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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MOTIVATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: A DESCRIPTION AND  
ANALYSIS OF A SUB-CULTURE

BY

BRENT CUTHBERTSON



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and  
Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1992





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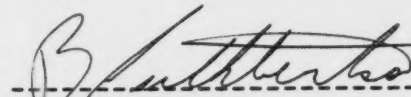
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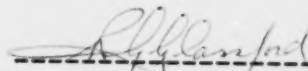
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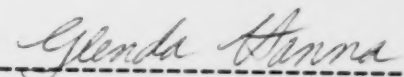
  
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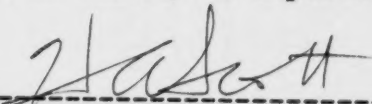
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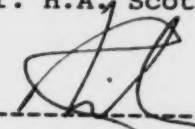
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TO THOSE WHO SPEAK FOR THE EARTH

## ABSTRACT

If the current trend of environmental degradation is to continue, more people will need to become active in order to maintain the ecological integrity of the Earth. There has been a noticeable increase in environmental awareness and concern in Canadian society and we may even be poised to witness a large-scale environmental movement. Society in general, and outdoor educators in particular, stand to gain much from attempting to involve non-active, concerned individuals, but a significant lack of understanding exists in the literature with regard to what motivates people to be active environmentalists.

It is argued that there is a need for a descriptive foundation of environmental activists from which to base further research and promote activism. An ethnographic approach is utilized in order to obtain an in-depth, descriptive view of the cultural aspects of environmental activists. Through a thematic analysis of semi-structured, open-ended interviews, this study explores motivations for involvement of some of Alberta's leading environmental activists.

The seven themes which were identified include: Defining Environmental Activism, Being Personally Affected, Connectedness to Nature, Personal Attributes, Perceptions of the Establishment, Perceptions of Social Parameters, and Empowerment. Each theme is discussed in terms of its

contribution to the initial and continued involvement of the activists studied. Finally, the thesis offers suggestions to activists and outdoor environmental leaders on ways to improve participation in environmental activism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In reaching the final product which is this thesis, I cannot claim to have been an island. There were many influences on me which helped to smooth and polish the rough edges. I would like to take this opportunity to thank some of those people.

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To Rod Wilson: thank you for your linguistic insight. I believe my meaning is clearer because of your involvement.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### INTRODUCTION

Imagine the following scenarios, if you will.

1) An estimated crowd of 10,000 people gathers one summer day to protest the construction of a dam in southern Alberta.

2) An environmental group takes the provincial government of Saskatchewan to court over the construction of two dams and the government's apparent unwillingness to conduct an adequate environmental review of their project. A court decision is handed down in favour of the environmentalists.

3) A sub-contractor in a controversial forestry development project arrives at work one morning in northern Alberta to find all the heavy machinery "physically altered".

4) A science station is constructed among the giant Sitka Spruce trees of the Carmanah Valley on Vancouver Island, staffed by volunteers and producing high quality research in order to provide a species inventory of a little-known ecosystem as well as to independently determine the long-term effects of logging the area.

5) The twentieth anniversary of Earth Day (April 22, 1990) attracts an estimated 200 million celebrants in 140

different countries.

6) For the first time in the history of human civilization, the heads of state from around the globe gather in one place, Rio, with the primary purpose being to discuss environmental issues.

These are but a few of the examples of environmental concern and activity which have become evident over the past few years. As environmental awareness increases, the evidence of society's concern also grows. Bailey (1990) observed, "The idea that conservation is a moral issue and that protecting the environment is something that is worthwhile in its own right surfaces repeatedly in surveys of public opinion" (p. 7).

In Canada, as in other countries, we are currently witnessing a resurgence of proenvironmental sentiment and action. Various forms of media have helped to bring the scenes of environmental destruction and the stories about a pressing need to address the global ecological crisis to the forefront of societal concern. A sense of the overwhelming ecological plight which the human species now finds itself in is expressed by Macintosh (1989):

Air pollution; toxic spills; rising levels of chemically induced cancers; widespread marine pollution resulting in everything from plastic to oil lapping up on coastlines around the world; global warming from greenhouse gases and deforestation; increasing health risks from our assault on the protective ozone layer; world-wide overharvesting of forests; growing scarcity of potable water supplies; soil erosion and expanding deserts; over-consumption and too much garbage with no place to go; shrinking

wilderness and wildlife habitat; the loss of wild rivers and the growing rate of extinction of plants and animals -- these are only a few elements of the serious ecological mess we now face (p. i).

This increase in popularity of environmental concern has manifested itself in Canadian society in several highly visible ways.

#### 1) Consumer Products

Various retail outlets, especially supermarkets, have introduced products featuring some characteristic(s) designating them as "environmentally friendly". Examples of such characteristics include: a reduction in the amount of packaging, packaging using recycled paper products, the elimination of phosphates and other chemicals from some types of laundry soaps.

#### 2) Advertising Campaigns

Associated with the introduction and development of environmentally friendly products is the sometimes aggressive position taken by corporations to convince the public of their environmental attitude. Recent media advertising campaigns by more than a few companies have stressed the environmental advantages of purchasing their products. The proliferation of store items espousing positive environmental values has led some of the major supermarket chains to introduce entire lines of environmentally friendly or "green" products.

### 3) Recycling Programs

Office departments, whole corporations, and entire municipalities have recently become involved in recycling programs. Provincial governments have also entered the arena by offering incentives to recycling operations (Laghi, 1991).

### 4) Environmental Organizations

Environmental groups such as Pollution Probe, Greenpeace and Sierra Club have gained respectability within the last decade, at the expense of government and industry (Ludlow, 1989). The increased believability of environmental groups by the public may be a result of the misrepresentation and disregard of environmental issues by government and industry in the past (see Ludlow, 1989; Thomas, 1989).

### 5) Media

There has been a marked increase in the volume and prominence of reporting environmental issues within the various forms of media. A number of newspapers have added regular environmental columns; television documentaries dealing with environmental destruction, crises, and other related issues have become more frequent and popular. The Environmental Council of Alberta, "...estimates the volume of press coverage of environmental issues in the province



is two to four times what it was a year ago and 10 times that of what it was 10 years ago" (Bailey, 1990). Not surprisingly, a recent poll revealed that television broadcasts and newspapers were the primary sources of information gathering for the Canadian public on environmental issues (Ludlow, 1989). Radio broadcasts, books, and magazines account for three of the next four most popular sources.

#### 6) Protests

Not only has a resurgence in environmental protests occurred, but the face of protesting has changed. Somewhat more radical forms of protest, such as tree-spiking and "monkeywrenching", employed by members of Earth First! and the ramming of drift net fishing boats by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, are increasing with a degree of success claimed by those involved. Khator (1989) claims that,

The nature, scope, and definition of public participation in political process has changed significantly over the last three decades. Contrary to the conventional view of the 1960's, which accepted political participation by the public only through democratic and non-violent channels, the literature today indicates a more tolerant view of participation. Several recent studies have treated violent, invisible, unstructured, and unintended actions by people as valid forms of public participation (p. 58).

The previous six points of discussion are tangible signs of a change in the social climate with regard to public environmental awareness and sentiment. Just what

the effect of a social environmental movement will have on our society remains to be seen. At the very least our everyday lives will be affected. Making peace with nature has some inherently value-laden choices. "Compromising" the lifestyle that industrial and economic growth has given us will bring hard decisions, but decisions that, sooner or later, must be faced. Today, some evidence exists that we may be willing to address at least the more pressing environmental issues. As a society (and perhaps in the future as a global community) we may well be poised to re-examine our relationship with a biosphere which is showing signs of the abuses of the Industrial Age.

#### THE SOCIAL CHARACTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

It might be argued that we are in the midst of another social trend which could fade as trends are wont to do. Besides, environmental concern and much of the associated social activism of the late sixties and early seventies certainly lost prominence during most of the eighties. However, it is more likely that this new-found interest in environmental matters will directly affect our everyday lives and perhaps have a lasting effect on society. Although there is some degree of debate with respect to the extent of environmental damage humans are causing, many scientists, researchers, and environmental activists have recognized a sense of immediacy with regard to a number of

serious environmental issues. If such a perception of urgency remains strong, an argument can be made that, from a cultural perspective, the general population will probably adopt a more protectionist, or at least conservationist, attitude. The fact that a social movement based on environmental concern is probably on the rise supports such an idea. There are several widely held perceptions which add impetus to the idea that environmental concern is not about to merely fade away as an issue of primary importance to society.

First, there is a declining belief that technology is still the key to solving the environmental problems created by our ignorance, mistakes and oversights of the past (see Schahn and Holzer, 1990; Ludlow, 1989; Weigel and Weigel, 1978; Maloney and Ward, 1973). It seems that we are constantly trying, without success, to catch up with an ever increasing rate of environmental destruction. The issues and concerns of the early seventies, such as air pollution, water pollution, and toxic wastes have not been mitigated to any significant degree and in some cases have even failed to be adequately addressed. In the meantime ever greater and more complex problems (e.g., global warming, acid rain, ozone depletion, massive forest destruction), demanding more sophisticated and costly solutions continue to emerge.

At the same time that we are unable or unwilling to

muster the resources to repair the damage done, the rate at which environmental destruction is proceeding is accelerating (Macintosh, 1989). Some of the serious environmental issues include the vanishing forests, widespread desertification, soil erosion, forced extinction of an estimated 150 animal and plant species every day, depletion of the ozone layer, and global warming (Brundtland, 1989).

Much of the environmental deterioration can be attributed to the fact that industrial development projects often are broader in scope than they were a few short decades ago. The rate of rainforest destruction alone has attracted worldwide attention and is said to have had significant ecological impact at the global level.

Within Canada megaprojects such as the James Bay Hydroelectric Project (Phase I) have had disastrous effects on both the ecosystems and the indigenous peoples of the area (Suzuki, 1991). The province of Alberta has also shown its determination to go ahead with some large-scale development ventures, most notably the Oldman Dam in southern Alberta and the construction of several pulp mills in the northern part of the province. While the merits of these and other government projects have been both contested and defended, the fact that there are environmental consequences, also of broad scale, is undeniable.

Third, there is a growing realization that no species, including humans, can be considered isolated from the rest of the planet and its natural processes. According to Price (1989), "Links between human activities and substantial changes in global systems were recognized as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries..." (p. 18).

However, it is the extent to which humans have affected the natural processes of the planet that prompted Goody (cited in Price, 1989) to write: "This is a unique time, when one species, humanity, has developed the ability to alter its environment on the largest (i.e., global) scale and to do so within the lifetime of a single species member" (p. 19). The recent, consistent exposure by various media of the environmentally destructive phenomenon, humanity, has found a philosophical foothold in society. Often stated in the literature is the concept of species and ecosystem interdependence. It is clearly becoming harder for members of society to ignore the signs of massive environmental alteration.

Fourth, it is also becoming increasingly clear that the natural world is finite in its capacity to support exploitation. Logging companies and environmental activists are squaring off in British Columbia and in Alberta to decide the future of a dwindling number of old-growth forests. Environmental activists are disturbed by



what is perceived as a lack of concern on the part of government and forestry companies toward the preservation of old-growth forests. As the number of these areas declines, their values increase for both environmentalists and logging companies alike, albeit in different ways. The fact that old-growth forests are at a premium, is perceived as being in danger of being logged beyond recovery, and are at the center of heated controversy underscores the notion that environmental issues are not likely to simply go away.

The example of old-growth forest in British Columbia is only one of the latest representations of humanity managing to seriously deplete that which was at one time considered inexhaustible. Other examples in history and of the present day abound: the great herds of bison which thundered across western prairies; the seas of tall grasses on the great prairies themselves; the unimaginable numbers of cod discovered by early explorers on the Atlantic coast; the natural richness of North American topsoils; and the vast tracts of roadless wilderness areas. Extremely serious is the recent threat to the supply of fresh water in some parts of the United States.

More than a few authors have called for changes in our society's attitudes which place humans above and somehow separated from natural areas, wilderness, and other species. A growing number of people have taken up the call to change this anthropocentric, environmentally destructive

course of humanity. The number of environmental organizations listed with the Alberta Environmental Network alone has increased from 217 in 1989 to 346 in 1991, an increase of almost 60% in just two years. Of course, this does not account for any increases which may have occurred in membership for groups which were already listed. Bailey (1990) makes the following assertion: "Interest in environmental issues is high and Albertans have never been more eager to take personal action to resolve them" (p. 5). Whether the average person follows through on the eagerness claimed by Bailey is perhaps debatable, but the possibility should not be ignored. Over the years, however, there has been a relatively small number of dedicated environmental activists who have shouldered the burden for the rest of us. Although people in our society now afford them more credibility, applaud their efforts, and may even wish to emulate them, long-time environmental activists have had their own reasons for being involved. These activists may inspire the rest of us, but given a chance, their motivations may also even teach us something!

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The central question of the study could be stated as: "What are some of the reasons and motivations which cause people to become environmental activists and to maintain a significant level of activism over time?".



Several related sub-problems must be addressed in order to adequately answer the central question.

1) What are the cultural aspects of environmental activism?

In other words, who are these people we call environmental activists? Essentially, the focus of this sub-problem will be to identify the common bonds which serve to unite the study group.

2) How do environmental activists see their relationship with society in general?

3) What are the worldviews of the people studied? Two areas of interest will be explored in attempting to deal with this question. First, what personal philosophies do the participants possess with regard to humanity's relationship with the natural world? Second, what general political orientations do participants hold and what implications do their orientations have for them as environmental activists?

4) What events, reasons, or other trigger mechanisms have led environmental activists to initially become involved?

5) What roles(s) do environmental activists see themselves in with regard to the environmental movement?

6) What reasons and motivations do environmental activists present for continuing their involvement?

## JUSTIFICATION

There is relatively little known about people who become environmental activists. If we can assume that there is an increasing level of environmental activism within Canadian society, or at the very least that there is potential for such activity, there exists an obligation to attempt to understand that aspect of ourselves. With either a real or potential social movement such as this looming over the societal horizon, a descriptive analysis of those in the vanguard might do much to direct future research in the area.

As I argue in the next chapter, an analysis of the literature reveals very little real understanding of what motivates environmental activists. The largely empirical body of knowledge and the confusion of results fairly cries out for a deeper, more intensive look at the world of environmental activists.

There are also educational implications for furthering our understanding of environmental activists. Free noted that, "a favorable attitude does not necessarily translate into action" (cited in Bailey, 1990). Other authors have also found this to be true (e.g., Hanna, 1988; Koenig, 1975; O'Riordan, 1971). However, correct environmental behavior does have a high social value and many people would like to be involved, but are unsure how to go about it (Green Revolution, 1989). If it is our intention as

outdoor educators to inform and encourage students, participants, and clientele to become involved in environmental issues in the future, a study such as the one proposed here would be useful indeed. A study which focuses on the reasons and motivations for involvement of those people who have for some time had a major personal investment in environmental issues may shed some light on how educators might cultivate similar behavior among those people who are not presently involved in environmental action, but who do have environmental concerns.

#### LIMITATIONS

The study is limited:

- i) to the extent that participants are willing to disclose truthfully their personal motivations, attitudes, values, and beliefs relative to the study; and
- ii) in its potential generalizability among all environmental activists due to the nature of the methodology (i.e., a total of seven informants were interviewed, they are all leaders in environmental activism, and they have all been active for longer than most of the other environmental activists).

#### DELIMITATIONS

The study is delimited:

- i) by the fact that the participants must meet the stated

criteria (as identified under the heading "The Informants") regarding personal levels of involvement and length of time the participants have been involved; and

ii) to the extent that the geographical area of the study focuses on the province of Alberta.

#### BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Any study must have one or more assumptions as its base I have identified a number of assumptions inherent in this study which should be recognized at the outset:

- 1) social change does occur;
- 2) we are in the midst of a social change regarding environmental issues;
- 3) environmental issues will remain a high priority in Canadian society over the next decade and beyond; and
- 4) we should be educating toward and even encouraging environmental action among students and the general population.

#### PERSONAL BIASES

It is impossible for me, as a researcher, to claim complete objectivity in this study. I possess beliefs about environmental activists and I support their efforts to bring about changes which would create a more ecocentric society. By ecocentrism, I mean a way of thinking in which humans do not see themselves as separated from the natural

world and its ecological processes, a way of thinking which does not merely focus on humans, but considers the welfare of the ecological whole, and which is demonstrated in the decisions we make.

It would have been difficult for me to conceive of this thesis, its central question, and some applications for the results if I limited myself to scientific detachment. I presently find myself attempting to move towards a more ecologically sensitive lifestyle and I have been in no small way impressed with some of the activists I interviewed. My own personal ecological philosophy is by no means set, but I find myself attracted to the messages of Deep Ecology and Social Ecology.

I believe I have gained a connection to the Earth through my years as a wilderness traveller and in my own short life I have seen some of the effects, both incremental and devastating, of humanity on these natural areas.

This subjectivity has, no doubt, found its way into every aspect of the study and probably in ways I have not begun to suspect. However, far from denying the existence of my biases, it is my duty to the reader to lay them out. In this way, I will be able to communicate to anyone reading my work a few of my attitudes relative to the analysis and discussion of the topic (Giorgi, 1971).

## THE INFORMANTS

In the tradition of the ethnographic method used for this study, the term informant refers to the people who were selected and in turn agreed to be interviewed by me. The use of the term was chosen to reflect the nature of the role played by the people in the study. The information with which they have supplied me has enriched my understanding of the world of environmental activists and, in many cases, they went beyond giving me merely adequate answers to my questions. There was also the opportunity for feedback by the informants built into the research design and it was my experience that the depth of the replies was substantive. At the end of data collection, there was little doubt that I had been "informed".

In selecting the environmental activists I wished to interview, the question of who was to be interviewed begged a number of other questions. For example, what exactly did I mean by "environmental activist"? Unfortunately there does not seem to be an adequate definition in the literature, and I was left to develop my own. The key to defining the term was the word activist. As it implies, some form of action or overt behavior was necessary in one's environmental concern to be considered. It should be noted that in the literature the term environmental activist is often substituted by the more general term environmentalist. The informants also use the two terms



interchangeably. A distinction should be made by the reader, however, between activism (or action) and concern. For the purposes of this study the emphasis in the former is on overt behavior whereas the latter does not necessarily imply that actual behaviors are present.

Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary offers the following definition of activism: "The practice based on direct action to effect changes in social conditions, government, etc." (p. 9). Expanding on the description of the term activism given above, I proposed the following working definition of an environmental activist:

One who engages in actions which are aimed directly at changing the behaviors and attitudes of others toward the natural environment. The term implies actions and behaviors carried out in favour of the natural environment.

In a review of the environmental literature six general types of activism were/identified which encompass the vast majority of specific actions. They are as follows:

- i) educational;
- ii) paper campaigns;
- iii) political lobbying;
- iv) legal action;
- v) civil disobedience; and
- vi) information gathering (for the purpose of dissemination).

Although virtually anyone who writes an occasional

letter to the editor or rides his or her bicycle to and from work may be considered an environmental activist, this study focused on the perennial activists, those people who are constantly in the trenches of the environmental front and who are recognized by others as leaders in their particular form(s) of activism. Another choice I made was to study a selection of the people considered to be leaders in the environmental movement. This was because within environmental organizations, the leader's motivation creates a significant impact on the activity of that organization (Kronus, 1977).

The length of personal involvement over time was another important consideration in deciding who to include in the study. One of the benefits of this study has been stated as the potential identification of motivational factors among environmental activists with the aim of utilizing those factors in educational settings. In order to maximize any such potential benefit, it would be useful to gain an understanding of those people who have not just recently jumped on the environmental action bandwagon. The surest way to accomplish this was to require that potential informants were active before this latest social movement became popular. It is generally agreed amongst pollsters in Canada that the first recent, large shifts in society toward environmental concern occurred during 1988 (see Green Revolution, 1989). Consequently, activists who have

been involved prior to 1988 more or less continuously to the present were sought for the study.

An initial list of approximately 50 potential informants was identified by contacting various environmental groups and organizations within the province of Alberta. Environmental organizations listed by The Alberta Environmental Directory (1989; 1991) aided in this regard. However, most of the names on the list of potential candidates were referrals from people knowledgeable in the outdoor education field and/or familiar with the environmental activist scene. I finally arrived at seven informants by attempting to balance a few factors. My goal was to identify a group of activists balanced in terms of gender and representative of the six types of activism previously outlined. Later I considered the factor of an urban perspective versus a rural perspective. The group of informants I eventually contacted and interviewed consisted of three females and four males and, I believe, fairly represented the six types of activism. With regard to the urban/rural factor, six of the seven informants conduct their activism from an urban base. However, two of the six had rural upbringings and one of those still lives in a rural setting. The remaining informant lives and operates from a rural base.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reveals a number of authors who have observed and predicted increasing levels of environmental awareness, concern, and activism in society. Tucker (1978) stated that, "Environmental quality has been and will continue to be a major domestic issue" (p. 389). Speth (1986) declared, "Today a new environmental agenda is emerging, and it is forcing itself on the attention of policymakers in the United States and the public at large" (p. 54). In reference to her study on protests of rural timber harvesting practices in thirty-nine counties in California, Fortmann (1989) observed that "As any careful observer knows, rural micro-protest is increasing" (p. 610).

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AND ACTION -- A BRIEF HISTORY

As humans, we have not always been aware of our capacity for environmental destruction, nor have we long been willing, even on a small scale, to protect and preserve aspects of our natural environment. A summary look at the history of Western civilization's environmental concern, or rather the lack of it, might serve to place our present situation into perspective. When one considers just how recently our society had no thoughts toward nature other than those of fear and domination, one begins to get

the sense that we could indeed be in the early stages of a large-scale social values shift.

In a rather comprehensive historical review of our relationship with wilderness, Nash (1982) outlines humanity's fear, distrust and desire to dominate the natural world. The concept that wilderness was a place to be feared, but also conquered and subdued was virtually unopposed until relatively recently. As Udall (1963) points out through a journal entry of one of the settlers at Plymouth the wilderness ethic during the colonization of North America was still a very hostile one:

Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wilde beasts and wilde men? And what multitudes of them there were, they knew not: for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to heaven) they could have but little solace or content in respect of any outward objects; for summer being ended, all things stand in appearance with a weather beaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wilde and savage hew (p. 13).

A number of authors (e.g., Nash, 1982; Hargrove, 1979; O'Riordan, 1976) have identified a shift in attitude toward the natural environment beginning with the romantic notions of European and American artists, poets and writers.

O'Riordan (1976) states:

The root of modern environmentalism is nourished by the philosophies of the romantic transcendentalists of mid-nineteenth century America... . Nature, they claimed, enjoyed its own morality which, when understood, could lead the sympathetic and responsive human being to a new spiritual awareness of his own potential, his obligation to others, and his responsibilities to the life-supporting process of his natural surroundings (p. 3).



Although these notions may have been noble they generally did not come from people who were in close contact with the natural environment. Instead, these romantics were largely urban dwellers (Nash, 1982; O'Riordan, 1976). Ironically, "Appreciation for wilderness began in the cities" (Nash, 1982, p. 44). Credibility perhaps came from the likes of Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, and John Muir, all of whom had a high degree of contact with the natural world and became inspirational thinkers for many who followed.

However, the fledgling new values espoused by a few did not seem to have much of an impact on society in general.

Industrial growth was peaking and not many dared to question the technological "advances" being made by humanity.

Aldo Leopold took another ideological step in developing the concept of humanity as only a part of nature and calling for a re-thinking of our philosophical attitudes with regard to our definition of a community. Leopold (1949) argued for an expanded human definition of a community which would include much of the natural world and its residents. Essentially, Leopold's position was that humans should not consider themselves as isolated from nature nor too important in the ecological scheme of things. Rachel Carson made similar pitches in her first



three books -- Under the Sea Wind (1941), The Sea Around Us (1951), and The Edge of the Sea (1955) (Fleming, 1972).

However, humanity did not take notice of its environmental destructive capacities until Carson published her politically-oriented book Silent Spring (1962), which exposed the hazards of some synthetic pesticides and chemicals such as DDT. The fact that the book was politically active and effective on a large public scale may have had implications for how environmental activists have conducted themselves since. At any rate, Carson has been widely credited for arousing the first stirrings of real public concern among the general public. Not surprisingly, the first major environmental movement occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's, after the awakening of the public's awareness.

Whether the actual involvement of people en masse happened virtually overnight (i.e., a matter of a few years) or not, and despite the apparent decrease in public concern with respect to environmental issues in the 1980's, there is widespread belief that the attitudes and values held by Western societies have been shifting for some time. In an article by Hargrove (1979) dealing with the historical foundations of environmental attitudes, the author stated: "In this paper I argue that modern American environmentalist attitudes are the product of several centuries of changing attitudes towards nature..."

(p. 211).

Essentially, Hargrove's paper is a critique of his own perception of John Passmore's position on proenvironmental attitudes. According to Hargrove, Passmore presents such attitudes as "...incompatible with Western traditions and Western civilization... and today are defensible only in terms of antiscientific nature mysticism and Oriental religions" (p. 209). Hargrove uses examples in art, literature, and science from the past few centuries of Western history to show a gradual change in the values and attitudes of Western society toward nature.

Although Hargrove does present a fairly credible argument for his central theme that proenvironmental attitudes can be directly linked to aesthetic aspects of Western art and culture, he also seems to misrepresent Passmore to some degree. Passmore (1974) recognizes a need for changes in the behavior and attitudes of Western society toward natural environments. In reference to environmental degeneration, Passmore stated: "That action must be taken, that if Western civilization is to survive, it must, in important respects, change its ways, is also sufficiently obvious" (p. 3). Passmore's intent is not to present environmentalism as incompatible with Western society or as "mysticism" as Hargrove suggests, but rather to develop a case for a reasoned, analytical approach to environmental issues. The nature mysticism that Passmore

would have us guard against is merely unreasoned action. Passmore's (1974) main thesis may be summed up by the following passage: "What in general I have tried to emphasize is that, if the world's ecological problems are to be solved at all, it can only be by that old-fashioned procedure, thoughtful action" (p. 194).

Hargrove does, however, point out that in calling so strongly for analytical reasoning, Passmore seems to neglect the influences of human emotion and feeling which are undoubtedly intertwined with making decisions concerning the environment.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AND ACTION -- RECENT AND CURRENT

Passmore prefers to address environmental issues from a strictly scientific standpoint whereas Hargrove makes a case for a more aesthetic approach in understanding environmental attitudes and values. But in the context of this study the salient point is the position expressed by Hargrove that such attitudes are well entrenched in our society and are likely to continue. Considering the present level of concern expressed by Western society over environmental issues as a function of the perceived increase of the severity of the environmental question, Hargrove provides more support for the position that environmentalism is probably not merely another passing fad. In his conclusion, Hargrove (1979) made the following

prophetic statement:

If all natural areas are destroyed in the name of economic utilitarianism, and human beings are no longer able to experience wilderness, it is possible that preservationist attitudes may disappear. If, however, some areas are retained in their natural condition and the contrast between them and populated areas sharpens, future generations may be even more radically preservationist than they are today (p. 239).

There is no shortage of recent authors who agree with Hargrove's vision of a lasting change in our society's attitudes toward the natural world. Gadacz (cited in Bailey, 1990) "...asserts that our changing attitudes and behavior toward the environment are 'part of a fundamental shift in values that will set the pace for the next century and perhaps beyond'" (p. 7). Bailey (1990) also cites professionals within the environmental movement who see the "changes in our environmental value system (as) deep and profound" (p. 6). Reid (1989) agrees: "The ideology of economic growth and development which has dominated Canadian society since the end of the Second World War may give way to a new ideology which places the environment ahead of economic growth" (p. A3). In writing about the impact of Earth Day 1990, an international event celebrating the virtues of the natural earth, Cahn and Cahn (1990) contend:

While it is still too early to assess accurately Earth Day's true impact, if the seeds of commitment sown on that day germinate and bear fruit--as they seem to be doing already on a small scale--it is possible that Earth Day 1990 will be viewed by future historians as

a crucial event marking the beginning of a decade of activism in which the environmental movement exerted increasing ethical and political influence (p. 18).

Although there is a general consensus in the literature that a marked increase in societal concern exists over environmental issues, there is not so much confidence that the concern translates into action. O'Riordan (1971) found that although 80% of a group of residents believed that the water quality of their lake was likely to decline, an average of less than 7% of the population took part in any one of seven possible courses of action against the deterioration of their water quality. Moreover, five of the courses of action required only a letter or telephone call. In their landmark study, Maloney and Ward (1973) concluded that, "In colloquial terms, most people say they are willing to do a great deal to help curb pollution problems and are fairly emotional about it, but, in fact, they actually do fairly little and know even less" (p. 585). A more recent perspective by Macintosh (1989) also demonstrates some of the frustration experienced by environmental practitioners: "Some of us feel that the gap between concerned rhetoric and action is widening" (p. i).

As I have already mentioned, a number of researchers and professionals feel that the concern expressed by society is genuine, but that the public at present is unsure of what actions to take. Immediately following his statement of frustration, Macintosh strikes a more



optimistic note: "However, the most positive news is that a lot of people care and want to do something, and if we start now, there is still time enough to change course" (p. i). Sharpe (1989) reports on a variety of approaches to teaching environmental concepts within formal education situations. One point that Sharpe makes in the article, based on an interview with a university professor is that, "Most students coming into university know very little about the environment and even less about ways to improve it..." (p. 22).

I have also stated earlier that an increased understanding of the motivations of those who are already significantly involved in environmental actions would do much toward aiding the process of educating future environmental activists. A number of researchers have attempted to construct profiles of people who are environmentally concerned and/or active. Most of their efforts have been aimed at linking proenvironmental behavior with sociodemographic variables. It quickly becomes clear that we are far from a consensus on just which sociodemographic variables are aligned with pro-environmental behavior. Tognacci, Weigel, Wideen, & Vernon (1972) have been credited with making some initial progress toward developing a profile of environmentally concerned individuals. Tognacci et al. (1972) found significant correlations which suggested an emerging profile: "The



environmentally concerned individual tends to be more liberal in sociopolitical orientation, younger, and better educated than persons who remain less concerned about ecological issues" (p. 85). Koenig (1975) criticized the study conducted by Tognacci et al. by drawing attention to the fact that the earlier research was "... obtained from a sample of residents, 60% of whom had attended college, in a university community with a beautiful view of the mountains...." (p. 476). Koenig sought to replicate and expand on the work of Tognacci et al. by using a sample from a predominantly rural area in Illinois. The sample used was homogenous in terms of race, age, sex, and residence (i.e., the respondents were predominantly Caucasian males of relatively the same age none of whom were from a community larger than 45,000). Koenig noted that the only significant correlates of environmentally concerned individuals were "liberal party political identification" and "salient political extremism". Koenig obtained these results by asking respondents to "think for a moment or two about social issues which were of concern to them" (p. 478). From the responses given, Koenig concluded that, "... individuals who are concerned with water and air pollution are likely to see such issues as part of a larger set of social conditions which are in need of attention" (p. 251). Although Koenig may be correct in that a number of environmentally aware individuals might

also be concerned with other social issues, his assumption that people would universally tend to think of environmental issues as social instead of, say, physical and/or scientific is rather suspect.

Maloney and Ward (1973) developed an environmental concern scale which compared three distinct groups (i.e., Sierra Club members, a college educated adult group, and an adult group with less than thirteen years of formal education) relative to four scales of concern and behavior: Affect, Verbal Commitment, Actual Commitment, and Knowledge. The Affect scale was designed to measure the emotions of individuals toward ecological issues; the Verbal Commitment scale measured verbal statements of what an individual would be willing to do with regard to environmental issues; the Actual Commitment scale measured self-reported actions taken by individuals on environmental issues; and the Knowledge scale measured familiarity of individuals with specific ecological facts (Maloney and Ward, 1973).

As might be expected, the study found that Sierra Club members scored significantly higher on all four scales than their counterparts in the other two groups. However, Maloney and Ward also found in intercorrelations among scales that knowledge did not significantly relate with any of the other three. In contrast, the other scales correlated moderately high with each other, including

### Verbal Commitment and Actual Commitment.

A number of researchers have since used the scales developed by Maloney and Ward (1973). A Canadian study (Smythe and Brook, 1980) to some extent replicated Maloney and Ward (1973), but with some modifications in the wording of questions and with a larger and more heterogenous sample. Smythe and Brook (1980) obtained results very similar to those of Maloney and Ward with one reported exception:

Whereas the [Maloney and Ward (1973)] study did not demonstrate a significant relationship between knowledge scores and any of the other measures, in the present study knowledge is significantly related to all three scales: Actual Commitment, Verbal Commitment, and Affect. (p. 184)

Using similar scales (i.e., Affect, Verbal Commitment, and Self-reported Actual Commitment) to Maloney and Ward (1973) and Smythe and Brook (1980), Schahn and Holzer (1990), attempted to link knowledge, gender, and background variables (i.e., age, gender, profession, level of education, and political preference) to environmental concern.

Conducted in 1987 in West Germany, the study compared data from questionnaires answered by 105 individuals involved in organized conservation groups and those answered by 167 people from the general population. Distribution of the questionnaires was achieved in the case of the conservationists by asking one member to circulate them at a meeting. Respondents from the general population

were reached by newspaper articles. Schahn and Holzer recognize the inherent bias of their selection process with the following statement: "This sampling procedure is, of course, liable to the bias of self-selection" (p. 769). Schahn and Holzer contend that abstract knowledge (i.e., conceptual environmental knowledge) is not a significant factor in moderating environmental concern, while concrete (i.e., directly applicable) knowledge is. The authors also found that women, people with a political orientation toward the left, people with an "internal attribution of responsibility" to the environment, and people who perceived a greater severity of environmental problems, all scored higher on the Self-reported Actual Commitment scale.

Tucker (1978) recognized a lack of research in the area of characterizing environmentally concerned individuals and hence conducted a study which attempted to correlate environmental responsibility with measures of internal-external control, social responsibility, social class, age, and income. For his purposes, Tucker (1978) defines environmental responsibility as, "membership or nonmembership in the Sierra Club and/or Audubon Society environmental organizations" (p. 392) and social responsibility in terms of "sacrificial other-directed behavior" (p. 393).

Tucker and his assistants surveyed and surreptitiously tested behavior of 27 Sierra Club/Audubon Society members

and 139 general population members at a shopping mall. Selection of study participants was by solicitation from the two club's membership lists and from public service announcements on local radio and television. To test behavior, researchers offered participants their choice of six cans or six returnable (presumably glass) bottles of Pepsi as a free gift. The bottles were considered to be the environmentally responsible choice. A second behavioral measure noted the selection of laundry detergent and the individuals were scored on the basis of the phosphate level in the brand chosen. The study found that all of the measures except for age was a significant factor in determining environmental responsibility. The income measure, however, was considered a significant predictor only for the Sierra Club and Audubon Society group members. The study did not indicate if or how it might have allowed for membership in environmental organizations outside the two mentioned. The study population also consisted exclusively of "female homemakers". Another criticism which can be made of Tucker's study is that the whole issue surrounding which Pepsi container might be the more environmentally responsible choice is a rather confused one.

Weigel and Weigel (1978) developed a sixteen-item Likert-type Environmental Concern Scale based on the work of Tognacci et al. (1972). The authors then tested two



groups, one from the general population and the other consisting of Sierra Club members. As expected, the Sierra Club members scored significantly higher than the general population with regard to environmental concern, but the study had a second purpose. On three separate occasions and at delayed intervals confederates surreptitiously solicited behavior from a sample of those people who had been surveyed. The first confederate requested signatures for ecological petitions. The second solicited help for a litter drive while the third sought participation for a recycling program. Weigel and Weigel (1978) did not report on whether the projects were carried out or not, but results obtained supported the authors' hypothesis that the Environmental Concern Scale actually could predict proenvironmental behavior. This study is significant in that it made the attempt to assess actual behavior instead of relying on self-reported actions of participants.

Perhaps if only one thing remains clear after a review of the literature on environmental concern and behavior it is the fact that environmental activism is not well understood. The sometimes differing and conflicting conclusions among the various studies point to this. Among the scales and sociodemographics identified by more than one of the studies reported here, only politics and education seem to enjoy a fairly high degree of support. Tognacci et al. (1972), Koenig (1975), Van Liere and Dunlap



(1980), and Schahn and Holzer (1990) found left party politics to be indicative of environmental activists. A higher level of formal education was found by Tognacci et al. (1972) and Tucker (1978) to positively correlate with proenvironmental attitudes.

A tendency for activists to be younger was noted by Tognacci et al. (1972) and supported to some extent by Van Liere and Dunlap (1980). However, Tucker (1978) found age to be of no significance. The role of knowledge is also somewhat obscure in terms of environmental concern and activism (see Maloney and Ward, 1973; Smythe and Brook, 1980).

In terms of demographic factors, Vining and Ebreo (1990) only add to the confusion with their study of recyclers and nonrecyclers. The researchers began from the hypothesis that "recycling and nonrecycling households would be distinguishable in terms of age, educational level, and sociodemographic status" (p. 66). However, the study indicated that while recyclers tended to be older and at higher income levels, there was no difference among the variables of gender, household size, occupation, or educational level. The data for the study was obtained from 197 households in Illinois.

The notion that we do not have a particularly good grasp on a profile of environmental activists is supported by Van Liere and Dunlap (1980). After conducting a

bibliography of twenty-one studies such as the ones discussed here, Van Liere and Dunlap (1980) reviewed and correlated five common types of hypotheses (i.e., those dealing with age, social class, residence, sex, and political orientation). Although the authors found moderate support for the hypothesis that age is negatively correlated with environmental concern, associations for the rest are severely compromised or weak at best. Two measures which did exhibit moderate relationships with environmental concern were education (a component of social class) and political orientation. In summary Van Liere and Dunlap suggest the following:

The review of evidence on the social correlates of environmental concern suggests that only three of the hypothesized relationships should be considered empirical generalizations. Age, education, and political ideology are consistently (albeit moderately) associated with environmental concern, and thus we have confidence in concluding that younger, well-educated, politically liberal persons tend to be more concerned about environmental quality than their older, less educated, and politically conservative counterparts (p. 192).

#### MOTIVATIONAL ISSUES

Although all of the studies discussed here have had, in some way, the aim of furthering our understanding of pro-environmental attitudes and behavior, merely constructing profiles of individuals does not go far enough. In order to create a deeper understanding of the people who become involved (and stay involved) we must move

toward the question of motivation. Moreover, in order to educate toward tangible commitments by the large numbers of people who are concerned, but who are not presently active, we clearly need to know more than sociodemographic profiles. Rather, we should attempt to understand more fully the motivations of those who are already committed in the hope that we may learn something of what we might be able to instill in a society steadily moving toward a values change in its relationship with the natural world.

One study, aimed at predicting responsible environmental behavior, attempted to move toward this. Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera (1987) performed a meta-analysis of other empirical studies over the decade immediately preceding their own study in order to determine "...which variable or variables appear to be the most influential in motivating individuals to take responsible environmental action" (p. 1). Of a list of 10 variables including age, gender, educational level, and income the following factors were considered to be correlated with responsible environmental action: knowledge (of issues and of action strategies), locus of control, attitudes, verbal commitment, and an individual's sense of responsibility. It is interesting to note that the sociodemographic factors (i.e., age, gender, educational level, and income) did not seem to play a significant role in one's motivation for involvement. Perhaps the environmental movement is one

that cuts across these lines.

Another study which focused on grass-root protests of toxic waste dumping approached the problem from a somewhat different perspective. Krauss (1988) proposed an alternative model of activism which holds that individuals become politically aware and involved as a result of first becoming involved in a single issue close to their hearts. Krauss contended that the experience of interacting with the political system allows people to recognize the shortcomings of the same system which they had previously perceived as protecting public interests. Further, Krauss holds that an experience so contrary to prior beliefs about the government may be a key factor in motivating individuals to maintain a level of political involvement. This model for activism appears to be in contrast to research which implies that people who are already politically oriented and active also become environmentally active (e.g., Koenig, 1975). Krauss' (1988) position, however, is not generalizable since her report essentially focused on the case (albeit in-depth) of one individual.

One aspect of Krauss' work which bears closer inspection deals with the reasons for individuals becoming active initially. The author stated that people who fit into the model she has developed are thrust into activist roles because they are confronted with the prospect of having to protect some aspect of their immediate

environment. Khator (1989) provided support for such a position. In a study of the Chipko Aandolan environmental movement in India, Khator (1989) proposed that a concern by the women of the village over the unfair distribution of the economic benefit of logging a nearby forest was the impetus for the now famous tree-hugging incident. Khator argued that an ecological perspective only developed within the Chipko movement, "once villagers achieved their goal of fair share" (p. 60). The Chipko Aandolan movement has been credited for many accomplishments within the realm of environmental protection since these beginnings, but Khator's position that the reasons for initial involvement were somewhat more anthropocentric in nature is an interesting one nonetheless. Similarly, in a study of 36 timber harvesting counties in California, Fortmann (1988) discovered that a concern for property value prompted residents to protest logging on land adjacent to their own. In searching for factors which would help in predicting, Fortmann found that one would be more likely to find protest "where increased proximity to natural resource raises property, aesthetic, or environmental concerns and where there are organizational forms and resources to give voice to that concern" (p. 611). One result, which Fortmann tended to discount, but is of particular interest here, was that some counties had "extremely high rates of protest" because the harvesting was happening almost



literally in people's backyards. Fortmann's results would tend to demonstrate that the reasons many people become initially involved are anthropocentric in nature.

Although the last two examples were based on economic grounds for protest whereas Krauss' (1988) example is grounded in environmental concern, the similarity among the three rests with the notion that in not one case were the actions by individuals or groups primarily motivated by altruistic ends. The implication here is that if selfish motives are shown to take precedence over altruistic motives among environmental activists in an in-depth study, education of the public on environmental issues may require a slightly anthropocentric tone in order to enhance positive environmental behavior.

It would appear that there is a degree of confusion in the literature regarding the motivations of environmental activists, indeed regarding the activists themselves. At this point, there exists a field with great potential, but which remains diffuse and lacking direction. From such a research perspective, it is clear that this body of knowledge needs to regroup, to take a few steps back in the general evolution of studies in order to gain a better understanding of exactly what environmental activism is and who are the people involved.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

In choosing a research method, the main consideration lies with the central question or purpose of the project. Essentially, a methodology should be chosen which is best able to effectively answer the question. In other words, the methodology must 'fit' the research, not vice versa. According to Howe (1985), "The continuum of choices is offered as a way to let the nature of the research question and the variables of interest determine the paradigm/ methodology followed" (p. 221).

The purpose of this study is to explore, from a cultural perspective, the motivations for involvement of environmental activists. Although environmental activists do not, as a rule, congregate in the classic physical sense of a community, the networking of ecological information and the sharing of similar environmental philosophies and principles tend to give them a sort of collective consciousness. Taken in this way, environmental activists within a larger, say Canadian, society may be considered a sub-culture.

Krauss (1988) suggested that people base their activism, "... in terms of their everyday experiences, concerns, values, and culture." (p.260). Because the level of activism targeted for this study is such that one experiences it as a regular, if not daily, part of one's

lifestyle, a methodology which examines aspects of people's everyday experiences should be employed. Spradley (1980) offers support for such an idea: "In our complex society the need for understanding how other people see their experience has never been greater" (p. vii).

The study attempted to explain the related experiences, feelings, and views of the various participants from their own perspective. The appropriate methodology for pursuing a study focusing on the cultural aspects of a group and attempting to describe and explain those aspects through the eyes of the participants is ethnography (see Spradley, 1979; Spradley, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1981).

Further support for a qualitative, ethnographic approach to the study proposed here is given by Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Spradley (1980). In order to study a group of environmental activists over a wide geographic area (i.e., the province of Alberta) the concept of multiple realities must be considered. An assumption of qualitative research is that people do not all view the world in the same way. Differing perceptions create multiple realities. This effect is enhanced when the group members being studied live separate existences outside the confines of a physical community. Although there are bound to be similarities among the environmental activist community, there are also bound to be many differences,

influenced in part by the geographic communities occupied by the various participants of the study. The methodology chosen should have the latitude to allow the researcher to explore that phenomenon.

In further defining the approach to be taken for the proposed study, the tradition of holistic ethnography appears appropriate. Jacob (1987) describes holistic ethnography as follows:

The most widely shared methodological goals of holistic ethnography are description and analysis of the cultural patterns of a bounded group, often with the further goal of presenting the culture as seen by the participants in the culture. This may be the only goal in the study or it may be one goal among others (p. 13).

Jacob cites the two methods used in holistic ethnography as participant observation and informal interviewing. Because direct observation of participants engaged in environmental action was beyond the scope of this study, the principal method of research was informal interviewing using a semi-structured, open-ended format. Consequently, the interview schedule was not rigidly structured, but rather allowed for such deviations as lengthy explanations and descriptions of events, and anecdotes for example.

A degree of structure was provided, however, to ensure that during the course of the interview the informants were adequately represented in the areas identified by the stated sub-problems of the central question. For a sample

of some specific questions, refer to Appendix B. The interviews were conducted between the Spring of 1991 and February, 1992 and varied in length between 1 1/2 and 4 hours. The interviews were also conducted at a location of the informant's choice in order to create as comfortable an atmosphere as possible. The locations chosen included homes, personal offices, and coffee shops. All interviews were taped and later transcribed for analysis. The relevant portions of the interviews and a summary of the analysis were mailed to each informant for comment. Two of the seven responded and their feedback was incorporated into the analysis.

Ethnographies have traditionally meant that the researcher would live with the people to be studied or that he/she would visit them while they were engaging in that part of their lives which was relevant to the study. The purpose, of course, was to become more familiar with the culture being studied and to attempt to share some of the lived experiences of the people in that culture. This study has not met that aspect of ethnography because of its design. That is, in choosing to interview leaders in the field of environmental activism as opposed to say, one organization or group, I also chose a population which is geographically dispersed. That decision effectively limited my ability to live with or to visit the informants during meetings and rallies to any great extent. However,

the study does follow the ethnographic method of informal interviewing, which is consistent with the objective of producing a descriptive analysis of a sub-culture (Jacob, 1987).

Support specifically for the type of research conducted here comes from Bealer (1989). In a critique of Fortmann (1988), Bealer observed a narrowness in the empirical studies of environmental protesters to date. He posed the question: "Why not go to them (in person, by mail, or by telephone) and find out the circumstances which led them to protest?"

(p. 606). Bealer (1989) further recognized the lack of depth in our understanding of environmental activists and proposed that, "Instead of a topside down, group-level attempt to substantiate past theories, one could do a bottomside up, inductive sorting out of what circumstances may have led this or that person to produce an actual protest letter" (p. 607). As evidenced in Chapter 2, the literature is predominantly positivistic in nature, but offers little that is concrete to the understanding of environmental activists. I have attempted to provide a descriptive analysis utilizing an ethnographic method in the belief that an in-depth view of the world of environmental activists through the eyes of several informants would make the greatest contribution to the body of knowledge at present.

## CHAPTER 4

### THICK DESCRIPTION

This chapter is an attempt to pull together some of the information given to me by the informants. Because of the nature of the study and the need for confidentiality, I could not utilize case studies or some other similar method of presenting the reader with a broader picture of what the world of an environmental activist might be like. Instead, I have drawn upon those aspects of the interviews which are sufficiently well-represented to portray a composite of the informants' worldviews. Essentially, the purpose of this composite is to present a rich, or thick, description of what it means to exist inside the culture of environmental activism.

Although Chapter 5 presents a detailed analysis of the various interviews, the structure of that discussion is thematic and it fails in some respects to fully develop a wholistic view of the environmental activists' world. In order to reflect some of the human context of the thoughts, ideas, and feelings which were expressed by the informants, I have given "life" to the composite description. Creating "Sue" is not an attempt to describe all activists nor does she particularly represent any one activist in this study. On the other hand, it is my hope that all activists will recognize at least some aspects of Sue within themselves and perhaps recognize all aspects of her among the other



activists they know.

#### SUE'S STORY

The meeting had been long and taxing, both mentally and emotionally. Sue leaned back in her chair and absently surveyed her surroundings. The clutter of paper all but masked the fact that somewhere underneath was a coffee table. The assortment of kitchen chairs mixed together with the living room furniture looked out of place, but had become an all too familiar scene over the years for those who met there. Half-empty cups and left-over baking would have to be dealt with and the makeshift board room rearranged to resemble a home again, but that could wait for a while and besides, Sue hadn't finished her coffee yet.

Sue wondered what had led her to this point in her life. What were the paths that she had followed to become so involved in this work that it took over as the focus of her activities? Sometimes it seemed to her like she had been an environmental activist all her life, but her mind drifted back to her years in school and she realized that she hadn't always been "this way". She felt a little more focused now. Sue had been good in school, quite good. She was at least consistently above average and maintaining that level never really seemed all that difficult to her. She remembered being involved in protesting some of the

social injustices back in her university days. But somehow she never did get into the organization of those rallies, and to her, organizing others was part of what it meant to be an activist.

There had been some good experiences in school for Sue. There were a couple of teachers who had helped her to really think, to approach problems differently, and who had taught her how to look for solutions. Of course, her family had certainly influenced her in that area as well. She had always appreciated the latitude her parents gave her to explore issues and to question authority. They had even encouraged her to be an individual and to stand up for what she thought was right. Although school had been a positive experience for the most part, Sue thought, it was actually the real-life lessons which made up the most important part of her education.

Sue tried to decide just when it was that she became an environmental activist. It wasn't an easy question, she mused, especially looking back on it all from this point in her life. She had always been sympathetic to the environmental cause, at least on some level of awareness, and certainly she had written her share of letters to newspaper editors and M.P.'s in the past. She felt a quick stab of guilt for having written those letters, not for expressing her opinions, but for having used all that paper. She felt the same way about the paper strewn about

the room now. For an environmental organization, her group used a fair bit of paper. It was ironic, and not without humour, that in some small way she had supported the pulp and paper industry by writing those letters. The world is indeed a strange place, she thought, at least the one created by humans, and her thoughts were about to fade away with the overwhelming senselessness that seemed to surround human activity when a painful memory brought her mind sharply into focus.

The anger rose with as much intensity as it did 15 years ago on the day she found out that the logging company was going to cut one of her favourite places on Earth. It was so hard to understand how anyone could clearcut "Twin Pines". The area had been proposed for protective legislation because of its ecological importance and sensitivity. Even the economic value of the place had since been shown to be marginal. And it was just inconceivable that the government should have let the company sidestep proper reviews and procedures in order to push forward the date the area was slated to be cut. Never before had Sue felt so personally affronted or affected. That sense of loss spurred her to vow that she would never let it happen like that again.

The experience also left her with a distrust for the establishment and a distaste for how those in power regarded the public and its attempts to participate in the

decision-making process. At every turn it seemed the power brokers frustrated her efforts to ask logical questions about the wisdom of the proposed clearcut. Mostly, however, they just ignored her. That was perhaps the most infuriating; the people who were elected to serve the public displayed little concern for what an interested member of that public had to offer them. How arrogant for anyone to think that they were so completely in control and adequately informed that what she had to say would have no value! That she should be so rudely refused to share in the decisions that affected her had certainly awakened her to the realities of the public participation process. Sue took another sip of coffee, but it was cold and getting bitter.

They had to change their tune, however, when the media picked up the story. A wry smile crept through the bitterness when she remembered how embarrassing the whole issue became for the government. It was too late for Twin Pines, though. In one sense it had all been for nought. The area was cut after all and, well, wasn't that the bottom line? Hadn't the whole point been to prevent that as an end result? Her efforts had failed to save that wondrous place. But there were positives that came from that action. It had set precedents for the future and some of the issues that followed were outright successes for the environmental community largely because of what had been

learned from the Twin Pines fight. Those successes are what she should concentrate on, she thought. A while ago Sue had decided that she should always look for the positive results of being involved in environmental issues. Certainly the successes kept her spirits up and gave her strength to continue, but it was a struggle sometimes when the results were not so clearly defined. Sometimes when she and her organization had forced a few changes on the original plan, but the essence of the development project ultimately went through, it was harder to see the positives. Most of the other environmental activists she knew dealt with the same internal conflict in defining their personal level of success. Not all of them came to the same conclusions as did she, however. Some were like herself, some held more mixed feelings and weren't sure where to draw the line between winning and losing. Some almost never felt successful because they believed that compromising on any of their goals was a loss the environment could not well afford. Besides, they argued, most development projects go ahead relatively unscathed by environmental activists anyway. Sue supposed that attitude was fine for those people who could sustain feeling unsuccessful without getting burned out. It may even help them keep their environmental goals and objectives in focus. For her, though, it was important to recognize the small steps of progress as well as the large ones. What

works for one person, she thought, may not be what works for another. Perhaps most important was that they all stayed involved and convinced more people to join them.

A scene from the meeting that had just concluded flashed in Sue's mind. The group had been trying to decide on the best way to approach the new issue that now faced them and everyone had been trying to talk at once. The picture Sue had suspended in thought was of Dave persistently trying to get his point across to all the others. His face plainly showed the passion he felt for this issue. Sue had been annoyed at the time with Dave's attempt to assert his views, but she smiled now at the image. Over the years she had often had differences of opinion with Dave. There were even some things he'd done in the past that she still could not reconcile within herself. At the very least she would have to say that they had different philosophies on how to get to the same place. She also recognized that Dave was quite an effective environmental activist. He had probably accomplished as much as she had over the years. Too, there were many times that the two of them had worked extremely well together and when each of their actions had complemented the other. In fact, Sue had worked with a whole range of people in the environmental movement and she invariably found that they had something to contribute. A friend of hers had likened the environmental movement to an ecosystem where all the members play a role in keeping the



whole process healthy and in balance. Every member had a function which should not be considered trivial. She liked that analogy; it made sense. It was complex in its simplicity and it was somehow comforting that the actions of people should resemble nature. It was almost as if there was that much more rightness to the movement.

Sue felt connected or drawn in some way to the natural world. It was hard to describe, even to herself, but at times it felt almost spiritual. Perhaps the family camping when she was young or the time spent at Grandpa's farm watching everything grow fostered the beginnings of the bond she now felt with the Earth. Those were magical times indeed, times which made profound impressions on her, but somehow even that didn't seem to provide a complete explanation for how she felt. There was some part of the connection that really was inexplicable.

There was something different in her, she realized, something fundamentally different about her relationship with nature than for most people. The notion that humans should consider themselves separate from the natural world or not affected by the health of the planet which sustains them had been a foreign one to Sue for many years. It was hard to understand the people who believed that the rest of the planet and its inhabitants were merely resources for humans to use as they desired. That kind of philosophy was so narrowly anthropocentric and short-sighted that Sue

would only become frustrated thinking about it. Sue believed that there was a place for humans in the natural world, but it certainly didn't involve dominating or conquering nature and the other species.

Perhaps there was one big difference between humans and the other species and that was our ability to think and reason. She laughed out loud when it occurred to her that in ecological terms we haven't really demonstrated that ability yet. Whatever type of intelligence it is that we have shown so far certainly has destructive power for the rest of the planet. And tied to that power, Sue thought, was a responsibility to ensure ecological health and survival for everyone, including humans. Our unprecedented power to destroy the life-support systems of the planet had to be kept in check because the stability of the natural processes depended on it. Sue considered it unfortunate that humans have been engineering their own demise, but the real tragedy, she mused, is that we are also dragging the rest of the Earth's inhabitants with us. In the end our fate is also tied to the fate of the planet which gives us life. That simple fact is inescapable and humans cannot intellectually separate themselves from it. To attempt to do so would be fatal and it would demonstrate our lack of real intelligence.

It seemed to Sue that the traditional native communities had figured this out lifetimes ago. She was

gaining an appreciation for what she perceived as the ancient wisdom of native cultures and their reverence for the natural world. The spiritual relationship that many traditional native societies seemed to have displayed was a much closer expression of reality for Sue than the synthetic existence created by the Western world which had essentially tried to divorce itself from nature. In many ways Sue now felt somewhat on the outside of the Western cultural mainstream and was feeling drawn to another philosophy which more accurately reflected her own thoughts and feelings about the environment.

Sue noted that society has begun to take the aboriginal peoples more seriously and she wondered if that was a sign that the broad social values were beginning to change. It was true that more and more people seemed to be changing their attitudes and behaviors more positively towards the environment. The public was more aware and informed, from an environmental perspective, than ever before and she had definitely noticed an increase in the number of environmental activists over the last few years. These days people were even asking what they could personally do about issues rather than what was being done.

It was encouraging, but the surface was only beginning to be scratched and there were always the deeper, more fundamental questions to be answered. Were people ready to deal with some of the underlying issues that would have to

be faced sooner or later? The biggest one, and perhaps one of the most difficult to tackle was the question of human overpopulation. There were so many religious and cultural issues which accompanied questions about population growth that it was difficult to deal with rationally. However, it's not a situation that can continue, Sue concluded. The simple truth is that there are just too many people on the Earth. If the exponential growth rates aren't confronted sometime soon, we will only be in for a bigger disaster in the future.

In order to create a more ecologically stable world, there are all kinds of adjustments, both major and minor, that people will have to make to their own lifestyles. Opting for voluntary simplicity and relying less on destructive technology, such as cars, are decisions which will not be made easily by most people. Humans are generally creatures of habit and convenience, but they can also change, thought Sue. Maybe we have already taken the first steps as a society through increased public concern. Living in harmony with the rest of the planet may not be possible in the end, but it has to be worth trying for, she decided.

What we really need are more people who are willing to recognize that ultimately the responsibility of taking action rests with the individual. Sue had always felt a need to be morally consistent with herself. In her mind,

if she ignored environmental destruction or hoped that others were taking care of it for her, she was just as guilty as the people who were causing the problems.

Perhaps some people just did not have the self-confidence to speak out and to question the "experts". Those were skills that she possessed and had developed over the years, skills which had proven to be helpful. People needed to be encouraged in those areas, she thought. They need to be made to feel comfortable in becoming activists and in making changes to their personal lifestyles. Once people make those changes they almost always feel better about themselves. Sue remembered some of the changes she had made and how they gave her a sense of increased control in her own life. She had felt more consistent with her values and somehow a more powerful person. Setting a lifestyle example was important to Sue because it had the potential to prompt others to change as well. Although role modeling was significant in her life, it was not enough by itself for Sue to call herself an environmental activist.

Encouraging people in society to change their outlook and behaviour toward the environment was basic to Sue's philosophy. It was part of how she defined herself as an environmental activist. She believed that in order to have the descriptor "activist" tacked on to the word "environmental", one had to attempt to directly change

society in some way. That meant going beyond what she did in her own lifestyle. It meant convincing others to become involved or educating people on environmental issues.

It occurred to Sue that there is incredible power when people get together with common ideas and goals. People tend to gain strength from one another and the experience of belonging to a group with a cause could be quite empowering.

She had seen that happen a number of times in her career as an environmentalist. She, too, had met, worked with, and learned from so many people over the years. Most definitely, she thought, the many wonderful people with whom she had been involved were one of the biggest gains she had made. They had often sustained her and always gave her cause for hope. The only thing left for Sue, and those like her, was to remain persistent in their pursuit of an environmental vision and to hope that the rest of the world would join them.



## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF THEMES

For at least two reasons it might be helpful as one reads this chapter to keep the thick description in mind. First, it is important to remember that even though the analysis of the interviews necessarily involved compartmentalizing people's thoughts and ideas, it was in a very human context in which those thoughts and ideas were expressed. The interconnectedness among the themes and the wholistic way in which the informants saw those themes applying to their lives should not be thought of as fitting into neat "boxes" of information. Rather, there is a dynamic aspect in which themes are constantly affected by concepts in one another.

Secondly, it is in this chapter that some of the differences among the environmental activists are presented. Sue was a literary representation of the major commonalties and in some cases merely the majority view of the informants' philosophies. However, within virtually any culture there are invariably minority views or even individual views which do not always conform to the popular thinking. Such is also the case for the sub-culture of environmental activists and this aspect will be explored here. It is my hope that by combining the information presented in the analysis with the humanizing influence of the thick description the reader will be able to gain a

clearer sense of what it is that makes an environmental activist tick.

In the analysis of the informants' interviews I attempted to develop "descriptors" and "themes" which would answer the central question of the study, namely, "What motivates environmental activists to be involved?". The process involved reading the transcriptions of raw interviews and describing distinct thoughts from the informants in a word or short phrase. These descriptors in turn served as a base for grouping similar descriptors into larger units called themes. The final result was the coding of the informants' interviews into seven themes and a variety of sub-themes, or descriptors, all of which have something to say about the motivations of environmental activists. The list of themes and their associated descriptors can be seen in Table 5.1.

Throughout the analysis, the names of the informants have been changed in the interest of confidentiality. The reader will note that while there are only seven informants in the study, there are many times that number of names used in this chapter. Care has been taken not to make it appear that the case for any one point is made stronger by changing names of informants within the context of the themes or descriptors. Therefore, within each theme, the number, names, and contributions of various informants remains consistent.

Table 5.1

## Thematic Analysis: Themes and Descriptors

| Theme                              | Descriptors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Defining Environmental Activism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-direct attempts to change society</li> <li>-constant involvement</li> <li>-organizational leadership</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2) Being Personally Affected       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-personal health and lifestyle threats</li> <li>-a sense of loss</li> <li>-background factors (family, education)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 3) Connectedness to Nature         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the outdoors in childhood</li> <li>-personal relationship with nature</li> <li>-human relationship with nature</li> <li>-human effect on nature</li> <li>-gaining a native perspective</li> <li>-connectedness to place</li> <li>-wilderness/city connection</li> </ul>                                                  |
| 4) Personal Attributes             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-questioning authority</li> <li>-resisting conformity</li> <li>-accepting other activists' approaches</li> <li>-accepting personal responsibility</li> <li>-need for personal consistency</li> <li>-persistence</li> <li>-seeking solutions</li> <li>-optimism</li> <li>-speaking out</li> <li>-role modelling</li> </ul> |

Table 5.1 (continued)

## Thematic Analysis: Themes and Descriptors

| Theme                               | Descriptors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5) Perceptions of the Establishment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-distrust of gov't and industry</li> <li>-the establishment as a hindrance</li> <li>-relationship between gov't &amp; industry</li> <li>-gov't mistrust of activists</li> <li>-civil disobedience as reaction to power imbalance</li> <li>-the freedom to speak out</li> </ul>                                            |
| 6) Perceptions of Social Parameters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-increasing awareness &amp; activity in society</li> <li>-the changing role of environmental activists</li> <li>-social inaction</li> <li>-society's view of environmental activists</li> <li>-environmental activism and social justice</li> <li>-overpopulation</li> <li>-the need for increased involvement</li> </ul> |
| 7) Empowerment                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-feeling successful</li> <li>-friendship and social support</li> <li>-lifestyle changes</li> <li>-finding a niche</li> <li>-civil disobedience as empowering</li> <li>-desire not to feel powerless</li> </ul>                                                                                                            |

## DEFINING ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

This theme does not directly address the paper's central question, but it is nonetheless important. In order to understand what motivates environmental activists, we must first understand how they define the concept of being an environmental activist. What does it mean to be called an environmental activist? What are the components which must be present for someone to be labelled, or for someone to label themselves, as an environmental activist?

### Direct Attempts to Change Society

A few of the informants defined themselves specifically in terms of their roles within the environmental movement. For example, individuals may have seen themselves as urban activists or wilderness conservationists. The definitions that people gave, however, seemed to focus on the term activist (as opposed to the term environmental) and the criteria needed to fulfill that role. Several people noted that activism meant that an individual should in some way attempt to change society. For Bob, changing society is central to his being an environmental activist:

What it means for myself (is that) I spend most of my time focusing on how to get people active to improve the environment. And as an environmental activist, I spend a lot of time educating people, informing people. That means going to speak to groups or schools, or at conferences, whatever that might be. It also means educating people by using the media and I spend a fair bit of time doing that, trying to make

the issues that I feel are important ones, to put them in a package that the media can then use. And there are some skills involved in that. And that's certainly an area where I've developed some skills. Also it means the lobbying aspect of trying to bring about change by putting pressure on key people in our society. ...So, what it means for me to see myself as an environmental activist is to have a vision of where we as a society could be, both locally and in a global sense and doing my utmost to help to evolve our current society into that sort of a society.

Pat agrees with having a desire to change society as a requisite for being considered an activist, but makes the distinction that activists need to work towards such a goal instead of merely trying to influence others through one's lifestyle. When asked if she meant that it should be the basis for one's livelihood, Pat clarified herself by saying, "Yes. And that doesn't mean that you have to earn an income from it, but rather than what happens in your own household or own lifestyle, that you're working beyond that. And often (it means) to change attitudes and increase awareness in people".

A closer look at Bob's comment hints at a related concept held by these active environmentalists. He talks of spending "a lot of time" doing this or "a fair bit of time" doing that which indicates that he is constantly and consistently involved with some aspect of environmentalism. This is certainly true for others as well.

It's probably pretty all-consuming. The political and environmental mesh together and it seems like that's what runs your day or your life, that you're always considering, "Now, how am I going to get someone involved" or "How are we going to work on this issue or that issue". It's something that's always on your



mind. And activism? It must be speaking out or contacting people or always discussing issues and trying to do something about them. ...we communicate daily on the computer or over the phone on so many issues. And there are always fires to put out; there's always something going on that's draining us. That's activism (Vivian).

Kelly sees the term environmental activist as a new label which the media and others have chosen in order to distinguish between those people who are more active in protecting the environment than the rest of society.

Well, I think it's changed over the years. I mean, (earlier) they just said environmentalist and that meant an environmental activist, someone who is active in protecting the environment. But now, more and more people see themselves as an environmentalist so they've had to come up with a new label. It's primarily for the media. "What do we call this person?", you know. And so more and more people have adopted and become what they see as environmentalists because they recycle or they now do things on a personal level. Therefore the media has had to pick a new name for people who are more active than the ordinary citizen and so they've labeled us environmental activists. Some people take that as an insult and some people say that should be left for those people who climb smoke stacks and do civil disobedience. But I see it just as a label for the media. The media needs, and the public needs, to be able to identify people and it's nice to be able to attach labels to a person. So, it's someone I see as more active in protecting the environment than an ordinary citizen.

Kelly notes that more and more people consider themselves environmentalists because they recycle or have changed some other aspect of their personal lifestyle. By implication, then, she supports Pat's statement that one's activity must go beyond one's own lifestyle in order to qualify a person as an activist, at least as far as media labelling is concerned. It is interesting to note that Kelly brings up

the issue of the need to distinguish between the rest of society and bona fide activism in the environmental arena.

Without intending to, Kelly is commenting on society's awareness of environmental concepts and issues. The social parameters will be discussed more fully later in this chapter, but the media's attempts at clarification suggest that they are taking a closer look at environmental issues, an area wherein the public is becoming increasingly aware and reactive.

#### Constant Involvement

In the following example, although Alan takes licence with some facts and figures, he eloquently states the case for how much time and effort is involved in being so committed:

Well, it's got to be the main part of your life. You've got to live it and breathe it. You've got to be willing to speak your piece and stand up for the issue. You've got to be a member of 100 environmental groups, 5,000 magazines (laughs).

Gene takes a similar stand to others in terms of what should be expected of someone wishing to be called an environmental activist, but he sees gradations of involvement:

It's somebody who goes beyond just being a member and expressing concern or being worried about (the environment). I would say if you're a member of an organization... but you're not doing anything beyond that you're not an activist. I think anything beyond that is activity (laughs). That means if you help out with a bingo once a year... then you're an activist;

you're giving something. Now the next level of activism is do you actually work on issues rather than just help the organization mail envelopes or go to bingos or casinos? And if you work on issues you can even work on issues on a couple of levels. So, I would say (there are) probably a couple levels of activism. One is volunteering your time for things that surround the environmental organization or work. You might go to a march or you might write a letter or do a bingo. And the next level would be (that) you're actually working on some issue directly. I don't know why it makes any difference, but that's the way I would define it off the top.

Bruce also recognizes the level of involvement that is required to be a committed environmental activist and half-jokingly he realizes the toll that is sometimes exacted from personal relationships.

...sometimes I'm glad that I don't have a relationship and a family and so on. I don't know how I would -- I'd probably just be a ball of frustration if I -- I don't know. I'd be a different person. Actually some of my relationships have broken up one way or another over my activism, but my mistress is the movement and the various causes that I'm involved in, and it seems like the women I've been involved with lately insist on being number one, not number two. I keep saying I'm looking for a good number two (laughs).

### Organizational Leadership

Another significant feature in the self-definition of environmental activism deals with taking on an organizational leadership role. Several of the informants felt that if they were not in positions organizing others with regard to environmental causes, they could not consider themselves activists. This descriptor was not emphatically expressed by the informants, but the need to see oneself in a position of organizational leadership

became clear in a number of answers. Gene touches on this toward the end of his previous comment when he distinguished between levels of activism. Although earlier he was not quite sure "why it makes any difference", Gene makes it clear in the following exchange that as people step up in levels of activism, their organizational role also increases.

Brent: What do you mean by working on an issue? What kinds of things would be involved?

Gene: You might take responsibility for an issue in your organization, for example.... And that means that you're attending meetings. You're the one who people talk to in the organization about that or you're working with other people in the organization on something like that. That would be issue-oriented activism. The other is you might run projects for the organization. So, instead of just showing up for a bingo you'd run the bingos, or you might be a member of the board. Those are all levels of activism.

Vivian struggled a bit with herself on this point, but offered this reflection: "As far as activism (is concerned), I'm not sure. I used to attend things or read things that were maybe by activists, but I never went out and did any organizing, which I would think is more (like) activism. My activism was mainly my big mouth and writing letters". Vivian also observed, "I may have been in some protests... in the 60's, some large scale ones, but I didn't feel that I was involved in the organizing of all those; I was kind of coming along. This statement demonstrates the importance that organizational leadership holds for Vivian's self-definition as an environmental

activist. Similarly, in trying to decide when she became an activist, Pat reflected on an issue with which she was involved in school and remarked that, "I didn't organize a lot of that stuff, but we certainly participated".

Kelly also tied the organization of others to the definition of activism, but approached it from a different perspective.

Well, I've always been active. In fact I went through university at the time of the civil rights movement, but because I was so involved in school I didn't get active in (the social or environmental movements). But always in high school and in college I was an organizer involved in class plays and I organized the student educational symposium.... and the open houses and that sort of thing. So I've always been an organizer and active, but never in the environmental area until I came here and I saw the environment threatened.

In this theme, three areas of importance to the nature of environmental activism have been identified. From the perspective of the informants, one must demonstrate attempts to change society in its values, attitudes, and behaviors with regard to the environment in order to be labelled an activist. This attempt may take on a variety of forms of activism, but should go further than merely trying to influence others through setting an example with one's lifestyle (This does not negate the usefulness of role modeling an ecologically sensitive lifestyle. Several of the informants discuss the implications of lifestyle later in the chapter). Second, the point was made that environmental activists are constantly and consistently



involved in their activism. Finally, environmental activists often find themselves in positions of organizational leadership. This aspect may be a result of having interviewed people who have been involved for so long and/or have leadership qualities, and may therefore be particularly attracted to this advanced level of activism.

#### BEING PERSONALLY AFFECTED

Kelly made it clear in her last comment of the first theme that her reason for becoming active in the environmental arena was that she saw the environment threatened. Considering that the outdoors plays a large part in Kelly's lifestyle, one can see that she probably recognized a threat to that which she loved, and by extension herself, prompting her to confront that threat.

#### Personal Health and Lifestyle Threats

The relevance of being personally affected is both direct and critical to the thesis' central question. That people tend to get involved because they come into contact with an issue that directly affects their lives was cited as a major source of motivation by most of the informants.

There are different things that motivate people to get active in the environment. Some are motivated by general education, whether it be in high school or



through the media; they just become more aware. But the majority of people are motivated because of something that they see (which) personally affects them. And that can be at different levels, but that's what brings most people into being environmental activists, is they see something that threatens them personally (Peter).

John concentrated on the aspect of personal health while speaking to the recent increase in public concern for environmental issues.

Why the big fuckin' interest all of a sudden? Yeah, I've thought a lot about this. And the one thing I think has been the biggest catalyst for increased public concern has been the personal health issue. Is the water I'm drinking safe? Am I going to get skin cancer from being out in the sun? What about the air? Are my kids going to be affected by this? And so, that's been a big motivator for a lot of people. Am I in danger now? It's not just the deer or the moose out there or whatever. Am I at threat now? Well if I am, boy, if I am, I want to see something done. That's part of it.

Chris reiterated the essence of John's message by observing: "That's society as a whole, I guess. If they see their standard of living eroding drastically, like quality of air, that's when they really get upset about things".

One of the informants mentioned the issue of personal health as a reason for a change in his own lifestyle.

...but I think one of the reasons I left the mill was because I thought I probably wouldn't make it to retirement if I continued to work at the mill and what's the use in working shifts all your life and having cancer to show for it at the end? (Wayne).

Conversely, a potentially adverse change to one's stable and peaceful lifestyle could act as a catalyst for activism, much as a threat to personal health does. Chris

gave an example of such a case.

It's good when all of a sudden you see a new face at a hearing and you say, "OK, now they're going to go through the experience and they're going to think about something a little more next time. At one hearing, a farmer came because this truck stop was going in next door. And he and his wife presented a brief and spoke and I was really impressed by the bravery of them because it is intimidating. Afterwards, he told a friend of mine that he's just going to have to get his head out of the sand, that he's going to have to find out what's going on and not leave it to councillors. So, that's a victory if people start thinking more beyond their doorsteps. The frustrating part is trying to get people interested in something to take that step.

With a touch of humour and irony Chris offered her theory on what it does take to get people interested:

Brent: Have you found any sort of keys that work more often with people, getting them interested, getting them out?

Chris: Yeah, threats (laughs). The major motivator. You know, "There's going to be this truck stop next door to you".

Brent: And that immediate threat is the one that works more often than anything else?

Chris: Seems to. Because when I wrote this letter I thought, "OK, now how am I going to get people interested?". So I took three examples of planning changes, that there's going to be heavy industry in (one area), and there's going to be a major... industrial development at a corner of the highway and then another one east of town. And I just said, "Are you aware that these things are planned?". And someone from (one of the affected areas) phoned and said, "Well, what's this development that's going in?". So I thought that these were kind of threats to their way of life. And I don't know what you can use to motivate people. That's a humorous thing, but it's probably true, threats.

### A Sense of Loss

With the exception of one comment from Wayne, we have so far explored the concept of being personally affected as a major motivator in terms of people in general, and not necessarily as it specifically relates to the informants themselves. The preceding comments and reflections represent what the informants have witnessed over the years in others becoming actively involved in environmental issues. That is not to say that the people interviewed for this project did not feel personally affected by environmental degradation. On the contrary, a number of the informants have been deeply affected and influenced by personal experiences. As we shall see, the difference lies in how the personal effect is perceived. For some, environmental threats proceeded to the point that a favourite or special area was damaged or destroyed. In describing her rise to activism Billie relates a story of a special area that was destroyed by flooding. A great sense of loss for Billie proved to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

For most people something happens that's the last straw. For me it was a series of things. We saw a series of things go. Right from when I was young I can remember when farmers in most districts started burning their stubble instead of working it in. So it was a whole series of things like that up until the one that I really remember and decided that was it, which was when they built the dam on the North Saskatchewan, the Bighorn Dam.

Billie goes on to describe her frustration, helplessness,

and finally the effect it had on her decision to become active:

I remember -- one thing that does stick out is that it was traditional Stoney lands; there were some very important ceremonial sites and burial areas before they built the reservoir. I remember our club up there getting a phone call on a Friday afternoon. We called an emergency meeting and I went over to this person's house and we'd been notified that we had until Monday to get all the camp stuff out of the area, that they were closing the road and the area would be flooded. That really sticks in my mind, just feeling so helpless at that point.... From that point on I just didn't ever want to be in that position of not having a fair chance to have a say about an area I knew about.

John recounted a similar experience while outlining the path which led him to environmental activism:

We were doing an inventory of where were the big trails, to produce a map, and I saw a lot of things through the eyes of these outfitters and guides affected by the logging practices, even back then. And the oil and gas industry were intruding into the backcountry. And through the eyes of these outfitters and guides I saw that the wildlife was really being threatened. And that bugged me quite a bit.

It is worthwhile to pause here briefly to note an interesting difference between the informants who have commented on issues or events which affected them directly and the way they perceive the general population as being affected. It is fairly clear that the informants perceive that in the majority of cases, people generally tend to become motivated as environmental activists when an issue or event affects them or at least has the potential to affect them adversely in terms of personal health or lifestyle.

However, longtime, consistently involved environmental activists also tend to see themselves as greatly affected when environments that do not necessarily have an immediate or directly adverse affect on them are unjustly compromised. The informants have somehow transcended the anthropocentric view which might be represented by the question, "What will be the effect on me or on human welfare?". They find themselves more often asking the question, "What will be the effect on the natural world and the rest of the planet's inhabitants?". In other words, these informants consider themselves as an extension of the natural world, somehow connected to it and not isolated from any part of it (for a more complete discussion of this concept, see the theme "Connectedness with Nature").

In her next comments, Billie puts into perspective another facet of feeling a sense of loss in environmental battles.

I did the closing statement which was really hard for me... because often you do this work as a professional, but when it comes down to it you know this land and you know those people, too. You're speaking on behalf of friends and family as well, so it was hard to finish off the closing statement because at that point it could have been the last time you could speak for saving the area.

In such situations, Billie also sees the potential for activists to become disenfranchised or negatively affected. She is able to sympathize with those people who have found the constant frustration and consistent pain of

environmental loss too much to bear.

Before I became an activist I sometimes wondered why you would hear of people that lead in some fight or environmental battle and then they completely drop out of the scene. And I used to think, "Why?! How could they just pack up and turn their back on the whole situation?" And now I see why. It is pretty hard, especially when it involves lands and people you know very well because every day you wake up you face the fact that you could be losing all of that. How some people survive that and some don't. I don't know.

Not all of the informants became involved because of negative experiences, however. Wayne told of a positive encounter which was formative in his development as an activist.

I would say my first real run-in with environmentalism was when I went back to (a city) after a year out west and got a job, particularly with the recycling project. And I worked in a recycling depot. That was a good experience.

### Background Factors

Their background and family situations also seem to have had an effect on some of the informants' progressions toward environmental activism. These are largely positive experiences which have contributed to their values concerning the environment and the cementing of personal attributes which have led them to pursue the role of an activist. The influence of background experiences certainly explain some of the drive behind several of the informants' involvement. Reflecting on his upbringing, Wayne explains the origin of his anticonsumerism:

...I think some of my tendencies go back to my parents



who lived through the depression on the prairies and I remember that my parents were always, -- and to this day, they're still extremely frugal. They don't waste anything; they don't overconsume. I remember through most of my childhood my mother saving margarine wrappers or butter wrappers in the fridge and she would use them to smear on frying pans so she would get everything out of them, out of the package of margarine or butter. And this was something carried over from depression days when you didn't waste anything.

At one point in the interview with Billie, we got into a discussion about a protest she became involved with in junior high school. A central issue for her was that girls were not allowed to wear pants instead of dresses and they were also not allowed to take the industrial arts, or "shop", classes. When asked if she had always been such a radical, she replied:

I wouldn't say such a radical, but certainly to a fair extent an individual. You see, I didn't start school until I was almost 7, which made quite a difference because I got an education of sorts at home and my own personality was a little more developed, I think, before I went to school. Although, I drove my parents nuts (laughs).

The story she told was an interesting one about herself and other students in the school boycotting classes in order to make their point. I pressed her for her family's reaction and her reply demonstrates the nature of her home life.

They were quite supportive, as long as they knew what I was up to and there was a sound reason for it, that I wasn't just doing it for the sake of being a rabble rouser or something with no thought to what I was doing.

In their bids to express individuality, family support has been important to a few other informants as well.

Although Chris did not seem to experience active support from her family for her personal attributes, she expressed an acceptance of her developing values.

Brent: Would you say that your ideas, that are probably considered by most people as being radical, were encouraged when you were younger? Did you get some encouragement to question and come up with that type of thing?

Chris: I don't know about that. I've just always been this way and I've been accepted as that in the family. ...I don't know about support in the family. I never thought of that. I have a sister and the four of us just were our own selves and just continued doing what we were interested in doing....

Chris received parental support through more than passive acceptance, however. Her mother was also involved politically and Chris remembers that influence.

My mother was working on the Stevenson campaign and that was my first leafletting attempt, when I was 7. Mom would go around door to door in this very wealthy neighbourhood that we lived near and get people to donate money or put bumper stickers on their cars and get them out to vote. So that was kind of my first interest in it.

An atypical educational experience was another source of encouragement for Kevin in developing his ability to question those things which the rest of us too often take for granted.

I think kids are generally asking questions at that age and for myself, I was fortunate to be in a small high school where people were encouraged to be themselves and figure out what they were doing and ask questions.

## CONNECTEDNESS WITH NATURE

As we have seen, the informants have certainly pronounced a relationship between feeling personally affected by environmental issues and being incited to action. Earlier, mostly positive, experiences in life have also influenced some informants' environmental values and attitudes toward activism. This section explores more of the environmental values that the informants possess and their affinity with the natural world.

In order to feel so personally affected when environments are threatened which do not represent immediate consequences for a given individual, that individual must at least have some sense of connectedness to the natural world which drives him or her to act on its behalf. Of course, it could be argued that people could act on behalf of the environment for fear of future repercussions for themselves and the rest of humanity. While such motivation is probably present to some extent, the informants' comments lead me to believe that there is more to their activism than the goal of self-preservation, of themselves or of the species. Almost all the people in this study demonstrated a profound respect for the natural world and its effect on their values and philosophies runs deep. The informants were perhaps more eloquent in expressing themselves in this theme than in any other. Their love for the Earth may be the one concrete foundation

to which they can anchor other parts of their motivation for environmental activism. After all, if they did not care for the natural world, these people might still be activists, but they almost certainly would not be environmental activists.

### The Outdoors in Childhood

There is definitely a bridge between the themes of Being Personally Affected and Connectedness with Nature and so a discussion of the first descriptor, "Outdoors in Childhood", could probably fit nicely into either one. However, underlying the personal effect of nature on the informants as children, there is the fact that some relationship or special connection has developed between virtually all of these people and the natural world. Julie explained simply that, "The outdoors and natural areas were always part of our background". A while later she expanded on that statement.

We lived our lives in the outdoors aside from when we had to be in school. We lived our life camping through the summers. It was the nature of my father's work. We were gone with him all the time. We were even allowed some years to get out of school early. Most weekends we were gone. Our school work never kept us back from going.

In describing the development of her land ethic, Julie told three wonderful stories about herself as a little girl which demonstrate so clearly some of the basis for her connection with nature.

I knew I was taught (that) things out in the wild were to be left where they are and that picking flowers was killing flowers. I can remember -- I had discovered what I later knew was a ladyslipper and we didn't have any right around our area, but I went further and discovered this one ladyslipper and ladyslippers are gorgeous plants. I was going to keep this plant, and I knew I shouldn't have. So I dug it up. Of course, ladyslippers have a very deep bulb and all I wound up doing was cutting up the stem and took it home and put it in a pot. Well you know, you can see what happens but you know you shouldn't have really picked it, that you should have left it where it was, and of course it died. I can still remember that. I was probably only 5 or so when that happened but that's in a way how we were taught. You see, we were told, it was explained to us, it would sort of sink in but you do things anyhow.

I think one of the earliest things I can remember is the frogs, all the frogs, in the wetlands, small wetlands and puddles that would dry up through the summer. I was getting concerned for all the little frogs. After tadpoles, they generally have all their legs and they have their adult shape, but they're quite small and these puddles (were) drying up. And plus Dad driving into the driveway, might squish some. So I would collect them up and put them into the bathtub and my mother was keeping the numbers of the frogs even in the bathtub and removing some and putting them back outside and Dad one day had told her to -- and some would die of course -- Dad told Mom, "Quit". If they die, leave them there and make sure she sees that they die". And I remember seeing the dead frogs, and that was it, no more frogs. I was leaving the frogs where they were. So that's how we were taught. Various things like that stick out in my mind.

I can remember -- things were never given human values, like there's good animals, bad animals and that kind of stuff, or things that happen in the natural world were good and bad. They were just all a part of a whole scheme of things that happened. I remember a fall snowstorm, a very bad blizzard coming really early to the point that the songbirds hadn't left yet and walking out with my father -- again, very young-- to see all that had happened and going along the fence line the meadowlarks had frozen on the fence lines and being really sad about it, but understanding that there was something much bigger there than I



could understand, that there was really nothing wrong with that, that it was taken in stride. So that's in a way how we were taught all that stuff, at a very early age and learned to value things.

Rural ties were important for a couple of the informants. Gary told of his childhood on the farm:

Growing up on a farm, you get accustomed to the sounds of nature and the quietness and it sinks in to your mind set and you build an appreciation that you just don't get when you grow up in the city. So, that's entrenched, my love for the country. And the rural areas are ingrained in me. That's one of the pleasures of growing up in the country. I think that's what stays with you.

Julie also believes that her farm upbringing has been at least partly responsible for her present values, but she is hesitant to label all those raised in rural areas as being in tune with the natural world.

We had an understanding of what a land ethic is -- well I shouldn't say especially coming from a farming background because a lot of people in, now the agriculture industry, have no land ethic and no concept of conservation. So that was there through my upbringing....

#### Personal Relationship with Nature

The following excerpt from Beth's interview leaves no doubt about her relationship with nature. She feels a spiritual connection to the natural world which she traced back to her childhood.

Beth: Certainly what motivates me most is nature. Coming home last night from a meeting and watching the northern lights dance across the sky, or going for a walk and seeing the wild orchids right up here blooming in the Spring or watching the patterns in the snow. If ever I get frustrated I go for a walk or if ever I have a difficult decision to make... I go for a



walk. I've always turned to nature, even before I became an environmental activist. When I was upset or frustrated I turned to nature and I think nature provides me with the direction and the answers in most cases and certainly the support that I need to continue. ...So, nature's the biggest motivator and... I think the spirituality of nature is what makes the difference. I mean, what attracts people to nature? I think it is the spirituality of nature....

Brent: And so how did you end up developing this spiritual attraction to nature?

Beth: Well, I think I've always had it.... As young as I can remember, if I was upset I would run out into the woods. And I guess I've always had it. I just never understood that that's what it was. Certainly also reading... and talking to people, but I think mostly I've just acquired it and it's just been there, the appreciation and awareness. I've always enjoyed watching the new flowers or watching the lichens on the rocks and I've just always loved them. I don't know if it's something that can be taught or it's something that you're born with or, I don't know.

What isn't clear for Beth here is how the connection developed in the first place. However, whether she is clear or not on how and why she came to have such a relationship with nature, Beth's love for the outdoors is reflected in her concern and respect for it. "I've always loved the outdoors, so I've always had concern and appreciation for the outdoors". Such respect is almost standard for the informants.

I think the wilderness is inspiration to people and it's the reality to most of the life on the planet. Very few species thrive in an urban setting. I think that my own sanity is often restored to me by getting out of the city. I think the city can be really stressful to people and all life forms (Steven).

For Steven, wilderness is a place to be personally renewed

as a human being and it is also home to most of the planet's other inhabitants. This is a distinct departure from viewing forests in terms of board feet of lumber and rushing rivers as potential hydroelectric power.

From a slightly different perspective, Gwen revealed her respect for nature through her comment on the virtues of traditional societies.

You think of societies that live with nature and are attuned to the real subtle changes or the changes that we don't even know about in smells and colours and scents of animals and it could be quite a rich world, something that we probably can't even imagine how nice it would be.

#### Human Relationship with Nature

From Steven's ecological look at the modern world to Gwen's vision of life in a tribal society, the common thread that ties the two is how humans should perceive the natural world. Steven later made crystal clear his stand on this concept.

What I see as a direction to head in would be where wilderness had a right to exist on its own terms, not in terms of the economy or anything, that wilderness is just there and that we need to leave it alone, for ourselves and for itself, that it's entitled to be there, that we as humans should learn to respect the fundamental laws of nature, that everything needs to be recycled, that nature is a cyclical system, and that whatever we take out we put back in.

Beth echoed a similar sentiment and made a case for peaceful coexistence of humans and the natural world.

Brent: From your perspective, in an ideal world, how do you envision humans fitting in to the natural world or the natural setting?

Beth: Well, to me humans are part of the environment. They're not separate from the environment. And we have to, just as any other species, utilize resources so that they're not precluded. So, we're part of the natural world, we have to live and appreciate and be a part of that natural world. I don't see us dominating the environment or the natural world. And I don't see us so much as stewards, but I see us as not being parasites and not being not destroying the natural world.... In the end species try to preserve themselves and so we could be the ones that run over the edge of the cliffs, the lemmings, or we can use the intelligence that we have to control our activity and live harmoniously with the other creatures of the Earth and with ourselves. I don't know if that's possible, but I think it's worth trying for.

Beth's vision of how humans should live with the environment leaves no doubt about her respect for natural processes. For her, living in harmony with nature is a prerequisite, or at least a corequisite, for humanity to realize that vision.

#### **Human Effect on Nature**

As with her colleagues, Beth is somewhat concerned as to whether humans will ever attain such a lofty goal as to attain harmony with the natural world. This is evident in her last comment in which she expresses both hope and doubt about the possibility of humanity achieving harmony with nature. Basic to the environmental activists in this study was the concept that we as humans must change the destructive course that we have set for ourselves and the rest of the planet. Among the informants there was total agreement that the general effect of human activity on

nature is intrusive and destructive. Steven put it most simply and perhaps most directly: "I think that all of us in this field, in this area, really have the broad vision of the impact that humans are having on the planet and of the need for change all over the place".

In explaining the relationship of humans to the natural world, the concept of having a respect for nature was often inextricably tied to the negative effects that humans tend to have on the environment. Steven admonished humanity by pointing out the brash self confidence of our activity in the face of such little real understanding of the earth's ecological systems.

The way I look at it is this complex web of life that allows this whole thing to happen, the whole planet to keep going the way it has for millions or billions of years, it's a pretty intricate sort of a thing. And as we start pulling out strands in the web of life by wiping out this species of butterfly or polluting that lake or heating up the atmosphere a bit and doing all these different things, we're yanking out threads left and right, and we don't know what we're doing. And I think that the sense of being humble in the face of this thing is one that we've lost as human beings. I think that we need a lot more respect for this whole thing, this whole process, how the planet operates. What we need to say is, "Wait a second. We can't be doing these things because we just don't know what the result will be". And that's where I think wilderness stands tall. I mean, wilderness is wilderness and it's doing its thing and we should be respectful and appreciative of that, and applaud it, and allow it to be.

For Steven and others, the treatment of the planet by humans is tragic and sad. The informants have dispensed with a worldview which sees homo sapiens as dominant.

superior, or isolated from the rest of life on Earth, but they are constantly reminded that most of the rest of us have not taken similar steps toward ecocentric values. Not surprisingly, some have chosen to distance themselves philosophically from a society which, in action at least, still seems to embrace massive ecological destruction. Instead, on ecological decisions, some of the informants prefer to side with our non-human neighbours. Steven explained.

My fear is -- my big concern is that by humans' activities we're dismantling the life support systems of the planet. And I suppose if we were to wipe out humankind by our actions, it would be poetic justice. You know, we do things that are stupid, that are damaging, destructive. We know that, we're aware of that collectively, at least on some level. If we continue to do them, we're essentially committing suicide, and we're gone. And that might be OK in some sort of global sense. There would be some justice in that. Certainly from a human perspective it would be unfortunate, but there would be some justice there, sort of like the lemmings. For whatever reason we have this image all just running over, diving into the ocean and committing mass suicide. If we did it as the lemmings, that would be OK, but the lemmings don't take everything else down with them. And that to me is really the tragedy of our situation, that not only do we have the responsibility of wiping out our own species, but we're progressively and in an accelerating fashion, wiping out the other species at the same time. Not only that, we're interfering with the ability of those other life forms to survive by tampering with the atmosphere, and in fundamental ways with the soil, and with the water.

Beth underscored the basic thesis of Steven's deliberation by simply stating, "It isn't so bad that we're going to destroy life for humans. I mean, that's bad enough, but the fact that we're going to destroy life for many other



species would be sad".

Gwen's sentiments are essentially the same, but she is less tolerant of humanity and does not suffer human arrogance and selfishness gladly.

It all fits into my idea of human greed and the arrogance of humans that everything is done for our benefit at the expense of everything else. Now, one issue is the hole in the ozone layer. I hadn't thought of it as how it's going to affect animals, but as humans get cataracts, animals will too. And so if you've got wild animals that are blind, how can their predatory instincts work if they rely on their eyesight? And I started thinking, humans can devise everything to protect themselves, but just think of the whole animal kingdom, and what about the fish? That's very depressing, I think, and another example of our arrogance. But it will catch up with us some day.

In another reflection of more or less the same point, Gwen introduced the worldview of her chosen political party which represents a significant number of mainstream society.

I'm a New Democrat right now because that seems to be a party that represents some of my concerns. I certainly don't agree with the New Democrats on a lot of issues because they're mainly interested in human concerns. They're not interested in the rest of what makes up the planet. That's probably the basis for why my love of humanity stops when I meet somebody (laughs).

The significance here is that Gwen recognizes that Canadian society, by extension of its major political parties, generally does not hold the ecocentric values that she and the other informants tend to hold.

An affinity for life other than human life was also expressed by Gary when he said, "Well, I guess I would fit



more into the deep ecologist's point of view: I have a lot of empathy, respect, and love for all the other animals". As well, Gary concurred with the concept that humans are generally negatively affecting the natural world and its inhabitants.

I don't think that we are above and beyond other inhabitants on this planet; (I think) that we're a part of it. We have a brain that gives us some extra powers but we're no bigger or better than any other part. We're part of the whole and we're screwing up the whole. And so that's probably why I don't think I'll ever stop doing what I do, which is to find solutions.

Michael provides support for what the others have said in recalling his development of a biocentric worldview.

For a long time I resisted the message of Ehrlich and so on. There seemed to be a more social justice viewpoint in the 70's and the 80's that said, "No, population, per se, is not a problem. It's just a question of how we share the earth's resources and the basic question is just one of social justice". Well, I think the population problem is a serious problem in its own right. I think the social justice issue is important, too, but I think in the final analysis we absolutely have to do something about our numbers, about the growth of our species. And that's where biocentrism comes in. To what extent do we have the right to condemn other species to extinction just to keep growing and is it a rational enterprise, this growth which will eventually result in our own extinction? So, as a species, we're in a situation where we can rationally look at the problem, maybe rationally do something about it. I think it's an issue that's going to have to be faced up to in the future.

Julie showed herself also to be in accordance with the thoughts and feelings of the other informants while discussing the responsibilities humans have with regard to the natural world. She suggested courses of action and

roles appropriate for humans in the natural scheme of things.

Where humans fit, then, certainly is interconnected with the natural world, not separate from it, but with one difference. They have, unlike other animals of the natural world, a power to destroy. They don't have the power to create living things, but certainly the power to destroy. And so, where human beings can fit better is to understand, and to first understand where they fit in the natural world, understand the power they do have and how damaging that can be and to sort of keep it in check or to keep it in line. That requires knowledge about the natural world and respect for it and developing things like a land-use ethic in conservation....

#### Gaining a Native Perspective

There is a significant degree of solidarity among the informants in terms of how they view the relationship between humanity and the natural world. Not one has espoused the notion that the non-human portion of the environment should be subject to the wishes of humans, that it is the right of humans to utilize nature as we see fit. Although such a notion is arguably the tradition of Western societies (see Nash, 1982), the informants consistently have very different, even contrary beliefs about the "superiority" of humans. In their eyes humans are often the aggressors, violating and disrupting the lives of other species and the natural systems which support them.

Perhaps partially because of this reason, most of the informants have looked elsewhere than Western philosophy for more favourable relationships between humans and the

natural world. A number of environmental activists have found inspiration that a less destructive association between humanity and nature is possible through the teachings of at least some of the traditional native societies.

Earlier in this chapter, Beth was describing what motivates her most in being an environmental activist. Her answer was nature itself and she began to talk of the spirituality which attracts people to nature. I did not complete her quotation, however, because what she said next applies to this next section of analysis. The last part of her thought runs as follows:

I think the spirituality of nature is what makes the difference. I mean, what attracts people to nature? I think it is the spirituality of nature and I think native people, of course, have probably the best appreciation for that more so than ourselves.

Julie also feels that the native perspective and natural worldview has something to offer the rest of society.

Brent: How do humans fit into a sensible land ethic? How do you envision us fitting into the natural world?

Julie: Now I'd envision it more the way you'd hear from the native cultures here in that it's certainly very much interconnected. That's the other thing that's come out of my formal education, too, and certainly reading writings from current wilderness and conservation philosophers and watching what's going on in the natural sciences, that in a way the natural sciences have come around to recognize some things that are the foundations of the understanding of the native cultures here.

Gary's answer to the same question agrees with the

idea that we could learn from the traditional native view of nature/human relationships.

Well, the main thing would be if everyone adopted the philosophy of the old Indian way of I'm going to put back what I take; if I take I'm going to give. If people adopted that philosophy, the pressure on the planet would be a lot less.

Michael presented a stance which is somewhat similar to the others in its main thrust of thought, but the message requires us to do more than adopt some of the basic tenets of traditional native culture.

As I understand it, a lot of white environmentalists are coming at environmental issues from an aesthetic viewpoint, outside the reality of native people, anyway. For the most part in Canada, I don't think you can consider the environment without seeing the intermediary role of the indigenous people in that environment. I think they're part and parcel of it and if you want to be part and parcel of the environment, too, you've got to somehow get on side with native people. It's almost a spiritual belief with me. In fact, that's beyond biocentrism even. I think there's a spiritual relationship to environmental work. And I would say the chief tenet of that approach is that you regard the Earth, in a spiritual sense, as your mother, as a person, as a being. And you also have to regard the indigenous people in the part of the world you're working in as the guardians of that mother spirit. And if you don't do that, I wouldn't say your work is irrelevant, but you're largely missing the boat. You're sort of off on your own trip without really making the proper connections.

Michael outlined what he saw as the main difference between native spirituality and the basis for Western society's indifference or even disdain for the natural world.

I think the native people are a couple of steps closer in principle to -- I mean I don't have much use for

white religion. When the book of Genesis said good-bye to the Garden of Eden, I think that was game over as far as white people being environmentalists were concerned. For native people, comparatively speaking, the Garden of Eden is an ever-present thing, that it's something you never give up on and you never abandon.

It should be noted that Michael does not speak for all of the informants in stating his view that Christianity essentially rejects environmental ethics. However, there are also those who would support him.

In apparent contrast to the majority, one of the informants has a very different view on how native people have interacted with their environment. When I asked Sandy about her feelings toward the emerging paradigm among environmental activists with regard to the native perspective on the natural world, her response was quite negative.

Well, first it's a bunch of crap. Native people are as bad on the despoiler side as any whites I've ever known. They live crappy lifestyles. If I poison myself with an occasional Coke, they're poisoning themselves with everything. Their life-style is so far from exemplary that they're not environmentalists on that level. This bullshit about how they're the only environmentalists, or the first peoples, or they were in balance with nature was pure bullshit if you study history. You learn very quickly the native people weren't in balance. They adopted technologies as quickly as they came just like anybody else. They invented some of their own and they took the ones that came along as all humans do. So actually, for them helping the environmental movement, they're actually in the way. They waste a lot of our time.

From her comments, it is not hard to gauge Sandy's feelings toward the concept that traditional native societies might have had a different spiritual or



philosophical connection with the Earth. Sandy went on to express her frustration with what she sees as a false cause taken up by other environmental activists.

So, at any rate, I'm irritated by... this call to natives providing the spiritual message of environmentalism because it's false. If you lie to yourself in that way, if you don't let yourself look at the facts, then you don't let yourself look at the facts in anything. And it's very difficult when a native guy is pontificating to stop it because all the other environmentalists are knee jerking and I find that disgusting. Although I understand it because I went through a phase of it.

Finally, Sandy gave her opinion on how native people are currently affecting the modern fight to save threatened areas.

I think it's unfortunate, too, the land claims business is getting in the way. My own belief is that the native people occupying some of the lands shouldn't be allowed to be the custodians, but that's the compromise we're going to have to make in order to get a new national park so we get more lands protected. Because there are some traditional hunting/trapping rights, we'll have to allow those to go on. Native poaching, I think, is a huge problem, and I think their rights have to be taken away from them. That's going to be a terrible battle. And finally the environmentalists are going to have to come out of the closet and say the natives are wrong on this. None of them are willing to do it yet, but the natives are wrong. They can't have universal hunting rights anymore; the Earth's too threatened. They're killing caribou now when they shouldn't be and they know it. It puts meat on the table for them, just like white folks. So, I think the natives are a problem more than they are a help. And I think the white environmentalists' hysteria around nativism is a psychological mindset that also screws up environmentalists. (It) keeps them from thinking.

Sandy is undoubtedly in disagreement with the rest of the informants regarding their perception of native people's connection to the Earth, even in the context of



more traditional native societies. However, a closer examination of Sandy's comments and the underlying reason for them reveals that there is probably not as much a disparity between Sandy and the others with regard to a personal philosophy of protecting the Earth as it might first appear. Another reflection by Michael gives us the key.

Let me say my motivation has changed over the years. My primary motivation now has to do with aboriginal rights, not so much how I'm affected or how even the environment is affected, but how native people are affected. But implicit in that is my belief that native people have a primary spiritual relationship with the environment and that given a chance they will defend the environment. The environment is caught up with the whole identity.

An important element for Michael in his support for native people and their rights is his belief that "a primary spiritual relationship" is entrenched in native culture. Other informants have intimated similar sentiments by observing that, "...native people, of course, have probably the best appreciation for (the spirituality of nature), more so than ourselves" (Beth) or, "I guess now I'd envision it more the way you'd hear it from the native cultures..." (Julie).

There is evidence in the literature on native culture which supports both views in this regard. Although Sandy's remarks may be particularly harsh, there have been studies which suggest that at least some native societies were not as environmentally friendly as they have been given credit

for. Ellen (1986), for example, writes a rather scathing review of traditional native environmental practices in his article, "What Black Elk left unsaid: On the illusory images of green primitivism". Ellen's thesis is that much of the reason for traditional native cultures leaving natural systems largely unspoiled can be credited to isolation, population distribution, and pre-industrial technology. On the other hand, numerous anthropological studies of the native cultures in North America suggest that Sandy is either wrong or at least over-generalizing.

Whether one conviction is more correct than another in determining the proper view for environmental activists to hold is perhaps irrelevant with regard to this study. That which must hold our focus is any apparent incompatibility between the motivations of Sandy and the other informants. Sandy has obviously chosen to see the issue from a different perspective than the other informants. However, Sandy's underlying reason for refusing to give native people the benefit of the doubt is because "The Earth's too threatened".

Julie, Beth, and Michael largely blame Western society for the environmental degradation we are currently faced with while Sandy would prefer not to allow other sections of humanity, including native North Americans, to go blameless. Beneath each disparate view on native people's connection to the natural world lies a recognition that the

environment is in trouble and that we had better do something about it. In the final analysis, then, while there is definite disagreement in the perceptions of the native cultures' relationship to the Earth, Sandy and the others still agree that the natural world is in need of protection.

### Connectedness to Place

Another slightly different aspect to feeling a connectedness with nature is something which has been expressed by some of the informants in this chapter, but is not apparent at first glance. More than a few of these people have revealed a connectedness to particular places which hold special meanings for them. Gary has talked about the wonderful life of growing up on a farm. He emphasized his connection to life in the country by displaying a reluctance to leave it.

There's parts of me that want to just stay home here and farm. I hate going into the city. I grew up on a farm and then we lived in the city for a while. And part of me doesn't want to go out anymore.

Beth has been an environmental activist for perhaps longer than some current, younger activists have been alive and although all natural areas are precious to her, two issues have endeared themselves to her above the others. When I asked Beth why these two particular issues had been more important to her she replied, "...because of the

issues, because of the place, and the specialness of the place.... Both of them have wildlife, rare plants, and Indian spirituality". Julie feels that when she goes back into the wild lands which re-create her soul, "it's just such a relief to, what for me would be to get back home because it's not just a recreation. It's part of my life".

### **Wilderness/City Connection**

One final notation which was raised by only one informant, but bears mentioning, is the connection which can and must be made between the natural world and city life. Steven outlined part of his motivation for implementing urban environmental programs.

To me, though, the connections between that clearcut and that dam and the way that we live in our cities is often overlooked. And I think that if we want to stop, if our vision is to protect the northern boreal forest, we need to find ways, here in Edmonton, to recycle our paper and our cardboard and to use less paper and to do without bleached toilet paper and those sorts of things.

For Steven, there is without doubt, an importance in preserving wilderness and natural places. But the fact that a significant number of people live in cities and have indirect impacts on these areas by utilizing resources means that connections to the Earth must be made for city dwellers as well. He offered this solution.

I started a garden a couple of years back, learning how to garden and how to grow food, and get connected directly into the environment by getting your hands into the soil. And that, to me, is probably the most

powerful environmental experience a person can have in the city.

#### PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Several significant patterns among the informants developed during the study regarding their personal attributes. This theme is of considerable import in attempting to understand some of what might motivate these environmental activists to become involved to the extent that they have.

Once again I should stress the interrelated nature of these themes. A more detailed discussion of the various connections and implications some themes may have for other themes is dealt with in the following chapter. However, it is relevant to keep in mind that these personal attributes do not exist in isolation, especially in the context of environmental activism. In other words, personal attributes such as the questioning of authority or resisting conformity are part of a complex web which seems to drive some aspects of motivation for environmental activists.

At the same time it is important to remember that each activist is an individual. It would be too easy to reach beyond the boundaries of this study and attempt to typify or even stereotype environmental activists. This thesis is



not psychological in its scope and no claim is made of having any insight into the psychological webs of the people interviewed. What is left in dealing with this theme is an analysis of patterns which have emerged among a group of people who have so far been shown to be similar in their goals and focus for the protection of the environment. Some important commonalties have made themselves evident which cannot be ignored if the objective is to gain an understanding of the environmental activist sub-culture.

#### Questioning Authority and Resisting Conformity

One well-represented attribute among the informants was the inclination to be generally questioning of conventional wisdom and practice. Ann expressed the need to possess a critical mind in North American society.

What I like to see are people questioning everything that's said and questioning the use of the word and the meaning of it because my other big gripe is the disinformation that goes on in North America and how things are presented in a certain way to elicit a certain point of view or response.

Of particular importance for Dale is to direct questions toward authority. He feels that authority figures sometimes become too complacent in their positions of power and do not often enough examine the validity of their own actions and decisions. Along with other activists, he defended the rights of anyone who is unsure



about a situation, regardless of their knowledge level, to ask questions about that which disturbs them. However, Dale also realizes that people who attempt to ask questions may encounter a barrage of ready-made answers which are not necessarily adequate, but are enough to dissuade further investigation by the inquirer.

For me to stand up and say, "Hey, why aren't we recycling our garbage?" Well, most people who would phone up their alderpeople or the Waste Management Branch... would be given a dozen reasons why the garbage was going into the landfill or into the incinerator. And most people, I suppose, would say, "OK, these are experts. I'm not. These people know what they're doing. I (don't). They're smarter than I am. So, they must know what's happening. I defer to them, and that's the best way to do it".

Both in high school and in university, Dale was fortunate enough to have the experience of being encouraged to challenge flawed conventional wisdom. Tradition for the sake of tradition does not necessarily promote intelligent and sensitive decisions which potentially affect us all. One must keep a critical eye on current practices with the knowledge that new information about how to better achieve one's goals is continuously being unearthed. Of course, we should always keep re-evaluating or reminding ourselves exactly what those goals are. Dale has developed such an ability through his schooling, but he saw his situation as somewhat unique and felt that few people in the mainstream educational system have had the opportunities to develop similar skills.

I often bemoan the education system that we have for the way that it discourages questioning and it discourages people from really asking fundamental questions about what are we doing, why are we doing it, how can we do things differently, where are we going, what's the whole goal here? The educational system really does not foster the skills, not only to question, but to find the answers to those questions.

Other informants felt that although questioning authority may have been fostered in them over time as well, there was something else in them which naturally made them this way. Joel told a humorous personal anecdote which embodies his feeling toward his questioning bent.

It's interesting, the fighters.... It's like some of us are stamped at birth (laughs) and there's no way that we can avoid being troublemakers. One of my friends once asked my mother -- I was a little embarrassed -- well, she asked about the particulars of my birth. And she was told that I was a breached birth and I've had a chip on my shoulder ever since (laughs).

Ann also feels that she must play the devil's advocate when it comes to authority figures. In our interview she had just expressed the view that sometimes she felt her efforts and the efforts of other environmental activists won't make any difference in the long run, that we will eventually kill ourselves off. When I asked her why she was involved if that was the case, Ann replied, "I guess it's this need to be, to always question authority. I think that must be the driving factor, (to) always be on the opposition".

By itself, Ann's statement can understandably appear to be antagonistic toward those people who bear the responsibility of making decisions in our society.

However, her stand against the power brokers, especially politicians, is founded on past experiences which have given cause for every single one of the activists interviewed for this study to distrust the body politic. The next theme, perceptions of the establishment, deals with this topic exclusively and in more detail. It is worth mentioning briefly at this point, though, in order to keep her comments in proper context.

In writing an article, Joel expands on his belief that responsible citizenry should include the process of critical thinking. In the article he even calls into question the term civil disobedience.

Actually I wrote something afterwards. I don't think I submitted it to publication in the end, but my question was if civil disobedience wasn't an oxymoron in the sense that if you're a responsible citizen, how can you be disobedient? I suppose if you're a psychopath, or a sociopath rather, then what you do would be disobedient and uncivil. Frankly, I like the banner on the Globe & Mail editorial page - "The loyal citizen is one who doesn't accept arbitrary decisions from the magistrate".

### Accepting Other Activists' Approaches

"Everybody has a viewpoint that needs to be heard" (Joel). Accepting the approaches of others in the field seems to be another quality which is fairly consistent among environmental activists, at least in theory.

There's room for everybody. No one has the right to say what kind of kind group should exist and what shouldn't. Let the Rotary Club be environmentalists please! If someone said, "How dare they be

environmentalists". I'd say, "Well, you've got it all wrong." No one has ownership on being an environmentalist (Ian).

For some people, the acceptance of who should be allowed to be environmental activists extended to the "radical" end of the spectrum. Although Shannon has ruled out some of the tactics of groups such as Earth First! for her own activism, she can understand how people get to that point.

I can certainly understand where they're coming from. I can understand how they come to what they do. Like I said, most of us, sometimes on a weekly basis even, have to face decisions because we know whatever's being threatened can't be replaced and so what do you do when it comes down to the final crisis and there are no other avenues left? And so far personally and for a number of people I know, that's gone to a little civil disobedience. It hasn't gone to the level of some of the tactics of Earth First! and that's some of, not all the tactics of Earth First! But I can understand where they're coming from.... I can to some extent understand how someone would want to do something for life rather than death.... So I have no problem with them existing. And people who do have problems with them existing should look at the root of why organizations like that need to exist.

Dale also sympathized with the radical end of the environmental activist spectrum and he noted a benefit of their existence for more mainstream activists.

In the final analysis, my perspective is that we need, at the very least, to maintain a strong, forceful, clear perspective of where we're going and that there needs to be some groups who will keep that flame alive, if you will. So, while I might not support all the tactics of Earth First!, I certainly am grateful that they're there. At the very least, they make groups like my own and other groups look more reasonable because of what they're doing. Now I will say a word in their defence, though, and the Sea Shepherd Society as well. The way that they put it is, the way that I've heard it put, if someone breaks



into your house and starts trashing your house, you don't sit around and launch lawsuits and talk to the person. Something needs to be done. My understanding is that Sea Shepherd and Earth First! are very adamant about protecting human life, that their actions are really against the property of the juggernaut that's destroying the planet. And I think that they need to be recognized for the work that they're doing. Unfortunately, I was talking earlier about how important it is to not alienate people. I think that their tactics do alienate a lot of people, but as far as I'm concerned that's neither here nor there. They're doing what they, in their hearts, feel needs to be done, and it's certainly no more destructive than the activities of Daishowa and Shell, and Dupont, and many others.

Two informants compared the environmental movement to a natural ecosystem. For them, the diversity of species and function which maintains balance in nature should also be applied to the concept of activists in the environmental movement.

Dale: I think talking about ecosystems is the perfect analogy for environmental groups. In an ecosystem, in a healthy ecosystem, you'll have a tremendous variation of species to deal with the situation. You know, there's the temperature or the amount of moisture, and the amount of sunshine, all that stuff. You won't just have, generally, one species of insect. You'll have a tremendous variation of insects or frogs or butterflies or trees or flowers or whatever. And the reason for that is, at least our understanding is, that that allows for changes to take place, but the ecosystem can still respond to them. So, if the temperature rises half a degree for a few years, there are species that have adapted or they can adapt to deal with that change. So, you have specialization, but you also have tremendous variety. The fact that you may have a particular butterfly, I think it's the Monarch butterfly, that tastes horrible....

Brent: Oh, the Monarch and the Viceroy.

Dale: Exactly. So, you have the Viceroy that looks like the Monarch so it won't be eaten by the predator because the predator thinks that that's going to be a

nasty taste, right? And you have incredible variety and sophistication within the ecosystem to deal with lots of different situations. I think that a healthy environmental movement will have a similar variety of groups. You'll have groups that will sit down and talk with the oil companies. You'll have groups that will take money from the oil companies. You'll have groups that will talk with the big polluters. You'll have other groups that will plug up the effluent pipes of these same polluters. You'll have people who will go into the executive offices of these polluters and pour sewage, or pour effluent on their carpet. As far as I'm concerned, it's all fair game. If we share a common vision of where we need to go, I think that nobody has a monopoly on what's the best route to get there (Dale).

Abby made a case for the same point.

I think we need a diversity of approaches. I think different situations call for different approaches and different people respond to different approaches. Certainly if it hadn't been for some of the Greenpeace people climbing the stacks, then a lot of people would not have become aware of environmental issues. But a lot of people get turned off by that and they need a different approach. We have a wide spectrum in Alberta as you may have noticed and some tend to criticize the others' approach: "You're working too much with government"; "You're not willing to work with government"; "You're too radical"; "You're not radical enough". And I see all of them as very valuable and we shouldn't be criticizing the other people because in nature, what gives nature its strength is its diversity. It's able to withstand much more because of that diversity. I believe an environmental movement needs a diversity.

A question raised here by Abby is one of some concern among environmental activists. Ian alluded to it in his plea earlier for us to see the Rotary Club as environmentalists if they wish to become involved in some way. In her comments, however, Abby directly confronts the issue that there is a certain amount of infighting among environmental activists as to which approach is best in



terms of tactics. Whereas some activists feel that we have sold ourselves short too many times in the name of compromise, others argue that an excessively radical stance will only serve to alienate the general public. One of the informants held such a view. When asked if he generally accepted the approaches to issues of other environmental activists, the reply was a pointed "No". His reasoning for opposing, sometimes publicly, other activists is twofold.

There are two reasons to do it. One is to affect the tactics, the other is to talk to (the general public) and make sure that they understand that the street tactics that seem rowdy and despicable to most people doesn't mean that they shouldn't be environmentalists. My feeling is that I have to help environmentalists create an atmosphere that makes it comfortable for people to become activists. That's my central mission....

With one philosophy depending heavily on public opinion as a key to success and the other philosophy maintaining that we can ill-afford the luxury of the precious time that will be spent slowly wooing the rest of society while more devastating compromises are made, it is easy to understand how tactical impasses are reached within the environmental community. In the final analysis, Ian attributed the rifts to a lack of ego management on everyone's behalf.

A lot of that comes out in all this in-fighting between the environmental movement and the groups. CPAWS says, "That's my issue!" and Sierra Club says, "That's my issue!" and then the AWA comes and they all fight. But it's like who is going to get front and center stage and it's like, aaahhh, can't you do it all together? And that's where I think some of the

turf war comes from. (They fight over) who has got the right and who is more credible to speak on the issue: "You're incompetent and we're a better group" and ego stuff. That needs to be worked on more. I think.

Ian's position is that environmental activists and groups should not fight or criticize each other in public. Interestingly, though, he does not see a need for an umbrella organization which makes public policy statements for all environmental activists. His solution for some of the controversy is a vision of local advocacy.

Brent: Would you like to see one big environmental group or would you rather see a lot of separate groups?

Ian: No, for lots of reasons, the more the better. You've got more voices when there are more groups. You've got differing opinions about issues, and you're going to have to really water down positions for that one group. You end up with sort of hierarchical control of the organization. The smaller the better because environmental issues are really small issues. All lumped together they become a big issue, like the fact that everybody drives a car. So the more decentralized and the more localized, the more opportunity you have to create solutions that are going to be of that nature which are localized solutions to deal with localized problems.

A final word might serve to alleviate any confusion surrounding this topic. I mentioned earlier that the informants in this study fairly consistently advocated a general acceptance of other approaches to environmental issues. This remains true for this project despite evidence to the contrary. Six of the seven informants addressed this concern directly with five of those supporting the notion of acceptance. However, it is also

undeniable that there are differences of opinion among environmental activists in general. Both inside and outside the confines of this study I have heard stories of both intergroup and intragroup disputes and power struggles. Whether or not the people interviewed here are notably different from the rest of the activist population cannot be concluded from this study. The fact that there is an element of infighting while most of my informants preach acceptance merely brings to light an anomaly which should bear further inspection in a later study.

#### Accepting Personal Responsibility

One area which garnered total agreement from the informants was that of taking personal responsibility for action. There was some variation in terms of what was meant by taking responsibility (i.e., in terms of activism or lifestyle changes), but essentially the message was to do something. Dale makes the point succinctly.

"Personally, having the information is not enough. The action is the key factor; the key factor is to translate the information into action".

In becoming a vegetarian, Dale outlined what it means to accept personal responsibility, to commit oneself to finding the solutions once confronted with an issue.

And then my parents tried to talk me out of becoming a vegetarian, but my mind was basically made up and that's what I was going to do. So, they humoured me for a while. When my mom was cooking supper she would

make steak and peas, and I would have a plateful of peas. I very quickly became aware that I wasn't going to survive on peas and potatoes so I started teaching myself how to cook and finding out to eat. So, that, really, looking back was a pivotal point in that I became aware of something and I asked myself what can I do and the action that was required, to me, was clear.

It is very important for Dale, and for other informants, that if people recognize an inconsistency in their lives between personal philosophy and their behavior, they should initiate change.

I think in the final analysis, the responsibility has to fall on the individual. And I often have these discussions with fellow environmentalists about cars or about recycling - you know, this game of where do we place the responsibility. People drive because they have to go shopping or to their child care or to the movies or whatever. And often people will put the responsibility on government. Because there is no alternative to the car, people drive. But I think the responsibility is all over the place. An individual has to take responsibility for their own lives. And I think that's really what we were talking about earlier. If I see the suffering and the exploitation to make burgers, if I know that to make veal in the restaurant that calves are taken from their mothers at a young age, put into pens where they can't sit down, and if I know they never get to go out and roam the range or see the light of day, then I think that there's a responsibility to do something. Once I know that most of the coffee that we drink comes from land that was stolen from the peasants in Central America, I think I have a responsibility to find more ecological and socially just coffee or to not drink coffee (Dale).

At one time, Joel had worked for a company which used chemicals in its operation. Joel suspected that there were long-term health risks associated with those chemicals and therefore with working for that particular company. His fears were strengthened when an associate died of cancer

who had worked for the company some 20 years or more. Seeing his own health affected by working conditions, Joel eventually left the company to pursue other ventures. Now Joel feels a responsibility to confront the issues which may cause him and others problems in the future.

...but now I have to think about what I'm going to amount to as a member of society, what I'm going to leave behind, if I get sick in the future, whether I have addressed the issues that may give rise to my sickness while I have a chance. There's not much you can do when you only have 6 months to live, and how do I know I won't come down with cancer in 10 or 20 years. The time to do something is now.

Like Joel and Dale, Abby has been impressed with the need to follow up on her convictions. In describing an attempt to stop a development project, Abby makes it clear that simply not being in favour of environmental devastation is not enough. For her, non-involvement cannot even be considered remaining neutral since those intent on development tend to interpret the absence of opposition as support from the silent majority.

I said our chances of stopping the (project) are probably under 20%. The fact is that if we don't try, we're as guilty as the people who are building (it). We might as well help them go out there and build it. If we believe that it shouldn't be built and the river shouldn't be destroyed, then we have a responsibility to try to stop it.

According to Colin, committing to a responsibility once it is recognized is really all anyone needs to become involved as an environmental activist. "Well, the only trait you need is are you willing to get off your ass and do something, actually". There is an unwavering certainty in



Colin's assertion. But even though there are undoubtedly other factors which lend themselves to involvement, Colin's directness has hit on a key point. The informants in this study have all found in themselves the willingness to become accountable to their own consciences.

### **Need for Personal Consistency**

Related to taking responsibility is the concept of a need for consistency within oneself. Joel approached this subject similarly to the notion of accepting responsibility.

I have an intellectual need to be consistent, at least to myself. I have a strong need to be true to myself, or to live with myself. I don't know if there are other people who can slough off internal contradictions, but I've never been able to do it very well.

Acting to remain consistent with one's values and attitudes may be an integral part of accepting responsibility. Others have touched on this principle, although perhaps not as directly as Joel. For example, Dale remains consistent with himself by being vegetarian and by not drinking coffee from environmentally unsound and socially repressive growers. Some people ride bicycles as much as possible instead of driving while others grow their own gardens, compost organic material, and recycle. Still others have rejected society's definition of "quality of life" as affluence and have chosen to live alternative

lifestyles. Some even get involved as environmental activists. Joel went on to explain his discovery that running from a sense of responsibility and a need for consistency is indeed difficult.

I was faced with a situation where I'd been helping Elizabeth May fight herbicide use in Cape Breton and now it's here and I never imagined that it would come here, at least so quickly. Now what do I do to remain consistent? At the same time I was beginning to realize there are environmental issues in Alberta and that you can't run away from them. You can imagine that they only exist in one part of the country or one part of the world and you can go somewhere else where it's safe and where they'll learn before it's too late. But in fact I realize now that that's not the way it works.

### Persistence and Seeking Solutions

An attribute which several of the informants have developed and demonstrated is persistence. It is perhaps not possible to overstate the degree to which the informants will pursue and have pursued environmental issues. I asked Abby what it was that kept her going when, during her first environmental crusade, she had been stalled, delayed, and ignored, literally for years, by the officials who were responsible for addressing her concerns.

Well, I never give up, I never give up. I'm a very persistent person, I think partly because of my background and who I am, but the harder someone fights me, the harder I'm going to fight back and I'm extremely persistent and I don't give up.

Dale agreed when he said, "You know, to me, what it really boils down to is to not take no for an answer".

You never know. You just keep working at the issue.

because if we quit when we lost the hearing, well that would have been it. You work on every piece of advice you get and see what you can do (Shannon).

The harder I have to fight or if a problem exists and if you don't find your way through one door, you've got to find a door that works. There's going to be a door; it's just a matter of finding it (Abby).

Shannon and Abby have introduced a new component to complement the quality of persistence in environmental activists. In their perseverance, several informants have found that exploring different avenues of attack, preferably at the same time, ultimately results in at least one tactic producing a desired goal. In this way environmental activists have found themselves ardent searchers of solutions to problems. Sometimes the search for a solution requires imaginative and creative thinking. The following anecdote from one of the informants demonstrates the potential for such creativity by an ad hoc and secretive group calling themselves the Road Doctors. I prefer, however, to leave this story uncredited in order to protect the informant's confidentiality.

I'll tell you a favourite action that, believe it or not, and most people don't believe it, I wasn't involved in. But I think it really was a lesson, or maybe an inspiration, of how action can bring about some change. And it's a story that you may be familiar with. It's a story of the "Road Doctors" in Edmonton. And I think the story is analogous to many of the environmental, (and) probably the social battles the progressive community deals with, of bringing about change in our society.

On 88th Avenue between 109th and 110th Street, in front of the High Level Diner there, 88th Avenue, for one block, runs westbound; it's a one-way street. And for years and years, cyclists going to the university

have used 88th Avenue as a major bicycle commuting thoroughfare. Coming off the High Level Bridge on the west side, they would then go along 88th Avenue to classes in the morning, or to shopping or whatever and then in the afternoon they would ride back technically against the traffic flow on 88th Avenue to get back on to the High Level Bridge.

This had been going on for years. 88th Avenue is a low traffic street; there's really very little danger riding against the motor traffic on that street. In Europe, for example, one-way streets for cars are designated as two-way streets for bicycles. And why not? And this street has room for the bicycles going in both directions to share the street space with the cars that are going in one direction. There was really not a problem there, except technically, every one of those, probably thousands -- on busy days there may have been a thousand cyclists, or more, going against that traffic.

Well, for some reason -- I guess it was about a year and a half ago -- for some reason, the cops started showing up at the parking lot at 109th Street and 88th Avenue and giving tickets to cyclists who were riding against the traffic, \$50 tickets. It was a ridiculous situation, but one, in fact, analogous to what cyclists have to deal with all the time in a city that's designed for cars and where bicyclists are really treated rudely by the system. Well, this was particularly rude, and the Edmonton Bicycle Commuters and some friends of mine put together a petition and started to get that section of the street designated as a two-way bike route.

Well we got all sorts of -- typically in these situations, you start asking for something that's different and the bureaucratic mindset says, "It can't be done" even though everybody knows it can be done. They came up with a dozen reasons why it couldn't be done: it would be dangerous, and it would be too expensive, or you know, on and on. Basically they were just saying that they couldn't be bothered. And there were a few hundred people who signed the petition. And it seemed like this issue was heading towards the dust bin. I mean, a bunch of petitions signed, submitted to city council, council ignores it, or reports may be done. Three years later you get a report as to why no change can happen and you're back to square one.

Well, what happened around that time was a group of



people calling themselves the Road Doctors, apparently one night went out with a can of paint, and painted on the road a yellow line, and put a bicycle symbol at either end of the road. The line was very squiggly. And apparently they sent out a news release saying that they were the Road Doctors, and that they were doing this, you know, why they were doing it, and that they apologized for the lack of straight-line technology, but they only had a budget of \$7.42. A very humorous news release. And I guess it was a slow news day; the Edmonton Journal picked up on it and ran the story virtually verbatim from the news release and a photograph of the squiggly line.

Well, a furor erupted. Councillors were responding to it, and it was a big media story; it made the front page of the Journal the following day. Charges were going back and forth about how complicated it would be to institute a bike lane on this avenue. And within a few days the city got out there with their equipment and removed the line, but the damage had been done, so to speak. The bureaucrats and the politicians had been put in the spotlight and they really had no choice but to start calling community meetings and so forth.

Within a matter of a few months, a decision was made. A bike lane was going to be put in on 88th Avenue. And in fact a few months later, the city went out again and at considerable expense, put in a bike lane, put up the signs, put up the barriers. And the bike lane stands today.

There are many lessons which can be learned from that story, but perhaps what it demonstrates best is that when activists have been forced by the bureaucratic system to find creative solutions to problems, they have often risen to the challenge. Shannon and her group had a similar experience while fighting a development project in a wilderness area in southern Alberta. Final victory after losing hearing decisions, organizing rallies, and conducting letter-writing campaigns prompted Shannon to remark, "...you can never give up because you never know



what's going to work and you've got to try everything...".

### Optimism

In the face of convincing victories and crushing defeats, which tend to happen almost simultaneously and at a tremendous rate, the feeling of optimism can be a nebulous thing for environmental activists. Every one of the informants acknowledged and spoke to the tenuous nature and position of our existence on the planet. Because of their avocation (or in some cases vocation) the activists in this study are acutely aware of the global environmental problems and the potential for annihilation we currently face. Some of the issues are so massively complex, convoluted, and confusing that the rate of environmental decline could easily outstrip the cumbersome, politically sensitive process of slowing, stopping, and then reversing the damage. With this knowledge, the informants are still engaged, day after day, in a struggle to somehow increase the ecological quality of life for all of us. At one level this speaks to the fact that each of them has at least some hope for significant change and that we are not yet too late to live more compatibly with the natural world.

One of the informants, Abby, is unique among the activists in that her optimism seems to be both consistent and steady. This may be due in part to the fact that she does not consider human survival as a necessity for the

planet's ecological success.

I've always been an optimist. I wonder if we're going to be able to save the world. But the world is going to go on existing whether we're here or not. Something is going to be here. It may not be the same as it is now. In 2,000 years, we'll never know the Oldman Dam existed. I have a very long perspective on things.

Such a philosophy leaves Abby free to work for the natural areas and the rest of the species to improve their lot in the event that humans do decide to rush headlong into extinction. Of course, by no means does Abby wish this fate for humans, but her expanded worldview does allow her to feel a long-term optimism, one way or another.

Although not all the informants share Abby's unfaltering sense of optimism, they also recognize the relative unimportance of humans in the ecological scheme of things. Some prefer to concentrate on successes which provide hope for change. Shannon, for example, saw hope in the recent sweeping changes in eastern Europe.

However, perhaps Ian expressed best the ambivalence some activists feel between optimism and despair in the following excerpt from our interview.

Ian: Optimistic? Things aren't very optimistic. On a global scale, we're losing badly -- anything from the climate change to the explosion in the population to the absolute, total contamination of every inch and corner of the planet with pollutants to wildlife being decimated, its habitat being taken away. You name it! We're not doing well. We're not doing well at all.

Brent: So for someone like you, who is more or less in the trenches every day... how do you keep going?

Ian: Once you enter into this work it's really hard

to stop because everything else becomes... irrelevant. (Other) work becomes irrelevant because you really get hooked on the sadness of what's happening and so to keep your sanity -- me anyway -- one of my ways I keep my sanity is to keep working and try to be an optimist and to think that yeah, we're going to get out of this. But if I stopped my work, I think I'd end up being quite depressed. It would be like giving up and if you give up what's the point of living, you know?

Colin agrees with Ian that remaining active seems to follow some type of inertial law and he offered up for consideration the notion that activism and optimism are synonymous. "Well, most environmentalists I know go through periods of despair and feeling awful. Their optimism is defined by the fact that they're active. And that's what optimism means; it doesn't mean happiness. You've got to be clear about that".

The only really clear message which has come from the informants on the topic of optimism is that it varies, not only between and among different activists, but also within some individuals. This is true, as Colin suggests, also over periods of time, whether it be one month to the next, one day to the next, or even one moment to the next.

### Speaking Out

If some environmental activists waver in their optimism for the world, they tend not to falter when it comes to standing up and speaking out for it. Defence of the natural world can take many forms, but the essence of environmental activism lies in its advocacy.

Traditionally, those active in the environmental movement have subsisted on a steady diet of confrontation with developers and their proponents. Although environmental activists have recently enjoyed more input in the public participation process and have gained a few positions of power in decision-making bodies, there remains an overwhelming number of issues which call for activists to confront some proposed destruction of the environment.

On being the subject of a political "abuse of power" one informant decided to make a stand against the affront. Reflecting on his action at the time, he observed, "I would say that... there was a moment where I thought, 'I don't have to take this. There is something I can do'" (Joel).

Shannon defended the right of anyone to get involved and make their feelings known, despite the fact that they might not be considered an expert on a particular subject.

I always contend that it's every citizen's right to say -- you don't have to be a scientist or an academic or whatever and know all the information about an issue --to say that such and such should not be happening. And they have every right because most of the things we're dealing with are public lands, public resources, public dollars. It's a democracy and people have every right to send off one paragraph saying, "I do not believe you should be doing such and such." And they shouldn't feel that they have to have all the information surrounding the issue.

### Role Modelling

All of the informants have come into contact with members of the general public as a result of their

environmental roles and most of them believe that their own lifestyles are important not only for remaining personally consistent, but also as a tool to get the environmental message out to others. Joel explained the concept of influencing others through personal lifestyle action.

It would be nice to be able to lead by example and sometimes I imagine that I am leading by example and that there's a fulfilling feeling if you're able to do what you thought was right and that it made an impression on other people who were influenced by what you did.

Dale is one who is securely in control of his lifestyle and is equally secure in his belief that one's lifestyle has the potential to influence others in the direction of environmentalism.

I very firmly believe that having some ideas isn't really enough; I mentioned how action is important. And I think that action, the ripples of action sort of ripple out from one's own life. I've always been a firm believer in having to practice what I preach, to (incorporate) my beliefs in my day to day activity. And that's really a challenge sometimes. But I think that it's key to do; I don't think that I could stand up and urge people to change their lives or their attitudes unless I've managed to do it myself and gone through that sort of struggle (Dale).

One of Abby's philosophical mentors is Gandhi because, she explained, he had the power to motivate an entire nation. Abby saw his strength of leading by example as being useful for the environmental movement.

Who else in the world has brought about so much change? ...How can you motivate, because that's what we have to do, motivate millions and billions of people to change their lifestyle. He accomplished that. And he accomplished that as an individual, one person through what he did with his own life and the



example that he set. I do believe an individual can make a difference, and I think Gandhi certainly made a difference.

One informant, who shall go uncredited, disagreed with the idea that one's lifestyle should parallel one's beliefs as an environmentalist.

My belief differs from a lot of the environmentalists who are into absolute personal practice. If you really bring your personal practice to reflect the globe, I think that means that you have to live at the lowest common denominator, or near it. That means that you have to live on very little money; you have to be almost totally self-sustaining out of a garden plot or something. I don't know any environmentalists who do that. ...My own view is that we're not going to solve these problems through personal practice and people who have a personal practice that is pure environmentalist, although nobody does, are deluding themselves into thinking that their practice will be copied by others. It's one way to approach change and maybe in 30 or 40 years, that way will work, but meanwhile I think legislation and regulation are the only paths.

Although this informant believes differently than the other activists regarding personal practices which reflect environmental principles, he nonetheless uses his personal lifestyle to influence others. In describing meetings he has had with, say the pro-ranching community, the informant will eat a steak, "even if I don't feel like eating a steak". The point that he hopes to get across from his actions is that people should not perceive all environmental activists as radicals of society. He hopes that this might make it easier for these more conservative people to possibly see themselves as environmental sympathizers, or even activists. In this sense, the

informant can be seen as using his lifestyle to work for the good of the movement.

It should be noted, however, that not all activists would condone or validate such reasoning. Some would see the value in making people more comfortable while becoming environmentalists, but hold that one of the goals thereafter is to continue moving toward a more environmentally friendly lifestyle, not to remain stagnant. Others would argue that compromising one's lifestyle in order to make it more comfortable for others to become activists is simply wrong. A comment I received from Ann in response to a similar statement made by the composite, "Sue", in the previous chapter, circulated among the informants for feedback, reads "I disagree - does everything have to be easy and comfortable"?

#### PERCEPTIONS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

It is not surprising that when visionaries who have traditionally had an alternative worldview to the broader society in which they live attempt to change aspects of that society, they run headlong into the frustrating wall of the establishment. The machinery of Canadian society, as with other industrialized nations, is largely driven by political will and the concept of economic growth.

Assuming this to be true we can, for our purposes, define the establishment as those institutions in our society which are widely recognized as having decision-making power, namely government and industry. A number of environmental activists reject some of the basic tenets of society, such as continued unlimited growth, because of their inherent ecologically destructive nature. Liz made the following case for the environmental activists.

What we're doing right now is cosmetic as far as how we're approaching environmental problems and you have to move on from that. We can no longer just fight the issues and we can no longer say, "Well, recycling is enough" because it's not. We're going to have to move on to changes in our lifestyles. And that means voluntary simplicity, but that means, I (believe), a better quality of life, not worse. Some people say, "Well, that's lowering your standard of living" but only if you consider your standard of living to be how many VCR's you own and how many cars you own. In fact, if we spend less time to pay off huge mortgages and loans, we can spend more time enjoying life, whether it be educational pursuits, or scientific or religious pursuits, or artistic, or the environment that we love.

On the other hand, those in positions of power are also generally those who resist changes to the system, especially fundamental changes such as how we define standard of living, introducing accounting procedures which actually reflect true costs of development and resource extraction, and calling into question the concept of unlimited growth. With the informants so far out in the vanguard of envisioning changes to how society could operate and the power brokers being perceived by environmental activists as "having to be dragged kicking

and screaming" (especially as environmental sentiment grows in society) into a new era, the stage definitely becomes set for confrontation.

Some environmental activists have historically been against the establishment. Bea went through university in the 1960's at the time of much social unrest. She described herself as always having had an interest in politics. While in school, Bea and others were sometimes involved in selling a radical newspaper, which she described as, "...sort of -- it wasn't an anarchist paper, but it was on that bent, slam the establishment". Dean also had experiences on the fringe of mainstream society. His summary of one particular counter-culture with which he was involved at the time is as follows.

Well, we were caught up first of all in the hippie movement and music, drugs, and existentialism and one of us was an actor. I don't know if there was a whole lot of environmental consciousness, but certainly there was an ethic at the time -- there was definitely an anti-establishment ethic....

No matter how these people might be judged today based on our stereotypes of 1960's revolutionaries, they were people with ideals railing against what they perceived to be the ills of society. A matured version of that vision of a better world has been carried through to the present and applied to the environmental movement. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the informants were very definitely a part of mainstream society, but have

merely developed what an anthropocentric outlook would call "radical" worldviews.

### Distrust of Government and Industry

Almost every environmental activist has a few stories about being ignored or mistreated by government officials when they have tried to follow proper channels in their attempts to get some action on a particular issue. The story of the Road Doctors earlier in this chapter is an excellent example. Liz told of one experience during which she had investigated an issue and linked the problem to a local industry. When I asked her if she had received any encouragement for her efforts, she replied, "...at that point in time, no, there wasn't anyone who encouraged me. In fact I got a lot of discouragement". She laughed at the memory, and went on to explain the situation.

Oh, yes. The government and industry were not happy because I tried to go through all of the routes to get the problem addressed. You know, go through industry and go through government and I just got stonewalled. I got nowhere until I went public with my concerns. And it's when I hit the media, of course, they got very upset, much more upset than they get these days. And so I got little encouragement at that point in time from the industry or the government. But there were a few environmental activists around at that time who certainly began to support me. So, I did receive encouragement from the environmentalists, certainly not industry or government.

Liz's brush with society's representatives certainly is not an isolated incident, unique, or even atypical compared to incidents related by other environmental



activists. The history of relationships between government and environmental activists has laid a foundation for the distrust felt by many activists toward the establishment. Among the informants, there was no stronger unified voice than that which doubted the ethics and sincerity of government's dealings with environmental groups and individuals in the public sector. An anti-establishment sentiment is alive and well among the ranks of environmental activists.

For many, giving government and industry officials the benefit of the doubt is no longer even an option.

I have a friend who says now, especially with corporation records and she will ask them outright, "Are you saying these things" -- because they'll give various motherhood statements which sound quite good but are of no substance -- she'll say, "Is this because of your ignorance in what to do or because you are intentionally being deceptive?" And she'll ask them outright and some cases that certainly is true. In other cases it's just out of ignorance (Margaret).

The lack of credibility with which the establishment is perceived is by no means unfounded. The treatment by government of people with new ideas which make nothing but good sense has sometimes been appalling. Phil cites another example of political "foot-dragging".

Another one is the toxic round-up paint exchange. No one had heard of it before, and we said to the city, "Let's do one". They (said), "No". And we've had 2 years of meetings trying to get them to do it and finally we got all the parties together, the province, all the different agencies and the fire departments and stuff, and we said, "Come on, let's go do it". And the city said "no", and Alberta Environment said "no" and "The stuff's going to go to the landfill. What's the big problem"? But finally it happened and

now you see toxic roundups everywhere, right? And they take the credit for it, like they invented it. Not many people know they had to be forced into doing it.

Phil does not begrudge losing credit for the idea because for him the important thing is that the plan was finally carried out. As a matter of fact, Phil even likes the concept of government taking credit for environmentally responsible ideas and actions. He argues that positive ideas might stand a greater chance of being implemented if politicians are allowed to take the credit rather than having to acknowledge someone else's work.

Stories like the ones from Phil and Liz have given rise to some of the antagonistic feelings that environmental activists hold for government and industry officials. Dennis also has had his share of frustration in dealing with officialdom and he made the following observation.

I've just recently come to realize that you may have the best idea in the world and it may work for environmental reasons, for social reasons, for economic reasons; it may be the best thing. But it just won't happen unless the political will is there and unless the climate is right.

Often, frustration with the government was expressed in angry terms. One informant described a situation in which he felt it necessary to vent his anger at the politicians who had made some sweeping environmental decisions without consulting the public. When asked what his anger was directed against he replied, "Well, a

government that had betrayed the people of the province and an environment minister who had betrayed his particular trust... (Dean)". The sweeping decisions in question were the leasing of massive areas of land in northern Alberta to long-term forest management agreements. Margaret also demonstrated an angry sense of disbelief aimed at the government's choice of actions. I had asked her if the increased workload she had noticed over the years was a result of more public awareness or just that there were more crises needing attention.

On one hand... it's because more is happening and the consequences of what's happening is even further reaching than what was going on before. The examples of all those Forest Management Agreements in northern Alberta is a good example. And you wonder when 1/4 of your land area or over 60% of your forested lands is signed away in an 8-month period without any public consultation, any prior planning for other land uses. That's pretty phenomenal. We didn't have things like that happening that I recall in the 60's and 70's.

#### **The Establishment as a Hindrance**

The informants generally saw the government as a hindrance rather than a help in their attempts to implement environmentally sound policies in Alberta. The government's environmental record in this province is seen as being so poor that Tom even places industry ahead of the government in terms of cooperation.

Well, the government's the worst. The corporations would be easier to change, I think. You see, the government right now is dominated by Tory politicians. They're the heads of all the ministries. They're the ones who are stopping progress. Oil and gas industry

isn't. The chemical manufacturers aren't. The pulp and paper mills? Some of the industry is, but some isn't. And so when you come right down to it, who are the people who are in our way? It's the politicians, the Tory politicians. They absolutely are committed against the environment and committed for development and there's no way any of them are thinking about environment as an issue. And they've been given that mandate by their party. Now the New Democrats may be no different because they are committed (to) jobs and when you look at jobs and job creation you find out that sometimes they're in favour of projects that are absolutely damaging too.

Although most of the other informants seem to equate industry with government in its environmental destructiveness, they would certainly agree with Tom that government officials are the main blockade to responsible solutions for environmental problems. Margaret put it this way: "So, what's standing in the way is a number of institutions and just how we define progress and the well-being of humans, certainly at the governing, decision-making levels". While Dennis spoke to the same theme as Margaret, he stated his case a little more pointedly.

People are prepared to do the right thing for the environment, but the politicians are in the way. And it reminds me of a quote, I think it was Eisenhower, president Eisenhower in the States, who said, "One day people are going to be clamoring so strong for peace that the politicians are going to have to get out of the way". It's the same sort of thing with the environment. The people are miles, years ahead of the politicians. ...And I think that as people's sophistication and understanding of environmental issues develops, and it is developing, that these bozos are going to have to get out of the way.

Dennis is also not convinced that large companies and multinational corporations are concerned about much more than maximizing profits. He has seen very little that is

encouraging in his years of promoting recycling.

But once you have those tons and tons and tons of newspaper, what do you do with them? You're basically at the mercy of big multinational companies. And they know that you're going to collect it if they give you a dollar a ton or if they give you 50 dollars a ton (laughs). There's a commitment, a social commitment, to recycling which is outside the economic question. The city's going to do it anyway. So they basically have you by the short hairs and they can give you whatever they want for it. And they can make you jump through hoops and do all sorts of stupid things. You know, years ago we had to remove the labels from the metal cans. They had people doing all this crazy stuff which really was unnecessary. But they could do it because they were the only ones in town who wanted the stuff.

At the time of our interview, Phil had been fighting the petroleum industry on their emission policies. His organization receives funding from the industry and he discussed the results of finding himself in that position.

Just this last month, (members of the petroleum industry) threatened me like I've never been threatened. And they don't want to move very far on global warming and all of the things that need to happen. They're looking at billions of dollars of expenditures required to reduce emissions and they don't want to reduce or stabilize, they want to increase emissions by 20 or 30%. ...so we've been fighting them and they've threatened me through different subtle ways like, "Pull the line or we'll ostracize you". Or corporations you're getting funding from, you might not get the funding. They've got all sorts of subtle ways of putting pressure on you. I've been there a hundred times. You see, there's a fine line right now -- it's the shits too -- of taking corporate money and still being an advocate and taking them on. There's a real fine line there of how do you maintain your integrity on the issues and not get bought out. I've been accused of taking corporate money and selling out and yet I know I'm still one of the hardest line people in Alberta.



### Relationship Between Government and Industry

Some of the informants have not been as generous as Tom with industry in evaluations of their environmental concern or performance. Bea referred to Alberta Pacific (a forestry company which is part of the Mitsubishi multinational corporation) as "calling the tune" on government officials in the county. She described her view of the relationship between big business and local government.

Well, I think the town boosters... still aren't looking back. It appears that industry... is calling the shots for the area because they've got the money and they know what they want and they can pay for the influence that will get the decisions made. So, in that way I think that (industry) is probably behind the scenes making known what they want and local government will fall in line. But that's not too hard to understand judging by who's in local government. You know, they're not mental giants around here (laughs).

On the provincial level, Dean sees the government not so much as an unwitting pawn that is pushed around by large companies, but rather on equal footing. He asserts that, "We have a government that's in cahoots with the multinationals".

### Government's Mistrust of Activists

Perhaps because environmental activists have always been asking for social change, they have also always found themselves watched with a wary eye by those in power. With social change sometimes perceived as a threat to the

establishment, the watchfulness has at times progressed to the point of suspicion.

There are some sectors who certainly see us as threats, threats to national security, to the point that at times I'm sure we're under surveillance. (They) no doubt have a file there. A friend of mine found herself in a position where she could get access to those files and found out that there's a file on her. If there's a file on her, there would be one on me so there's that aspect to Canadian society that wants to, in essence criminalize us. And they really see us as a threat, which is absurd because if they're spending time seeing us as threats, they're missing some of the real threats, which is unfortunate (Margaret).

Knowledge that one is probably the target of investigation by the intelligence service of one's own country can be an unsettling revelation. Although Margaret maintains that she does not let it affect her responsibilities, the fact that a surveillance file definitely exists for her friend and likely for her as well certainly can go a long way toward undermining any feelings of goodwill between herself and the establishment.

You don't let it bother you to the extent that it interferes with your work, but on the other hand it is frustrating when (it happens). I'm quite concerned about the survival of democracy and to what extent we really want a democracy and if you look at things that are destabilizing the country it's certainly not environmentalists. So on that level, it's quite objectionable (Margaret).

Dean concurs that the powers of the state are somewhat misdirected in dealing with environmental activists.

Speaking about the lack of freedom he feels individuals have in expressing themselves Dean commented that, "...

there are very definite limits on what an individual can do. There are virtually no limits on what the government can do; to my mind (they have) dictatorial powers".

### Civil Disobedience as a Reaction to Power Imbalance

It begins to become clearer why, given the establishment's attitudes and behavior toward environmental activists, some activists either sympathize with or turn to civil disobedience tactics in an attempt to become more effective. Earlier in this chapter, we learned from some informants who were accepting of other approaches to environmental activism. Two informants even stated that they could understand how Earth First! supporters came to adopt their philosophies and methodologies of activism. While none of the informants in this study condoned the use of violence against humans in environmental activism, more than a few saw the benefits of non-violent civil disobedience.

When asked if he viewed civil disobedience as a valid form of public participation in the environmental movement, Dean responded this way:

Well I think environmentalists have to be prepared to take that step. Now, I don't think that civil disobedience involves violence. I think there's a lot of violence involved in what government does everyday. I mean, there's violence towards the environment, there's violence towards people's lives, there's violence everywhere towards native people. You're not starting from a situation where there's no violence to begin with. I mean, (it's) extremely violent what companies are doing to the globe. So, a certain

amount of pushing and shoving the other way is not inappropriate.

Liz agreed with Dean, but she cautioned people to consider the consequences in our society of such action.

And there must come a point where people say, "I'm prepared to suffer the consequences" and you must be if you're going to take civil disobedience -- it's illegal -- and you must be prepared and welcome the consequences to bring about the change. But there has to come that point and I'm not sure where that point is. I think each person has to make that decision themselves.

Dean put into perspective his view of how to react as a member of the public to what he sees as the corrupt system of politics. "But I mean it's politics, eh? It's a rough and tumble game and the politicians do dirty things to the public and the public use whatever chances come to them".

#### The Freedom to Speak Out

The sole positive comment on the establishment came from Liz.

In most countries I would have been shot or jailed for what I've done, and so I feel pretty proud to have a country that allows me to take on a government, two governments, Canada and Alberta, in the way that I have and still have the freedoms that I have. So, yes, I get criticized, but that's part of democracy. And if people aren't willing to do that, then we've lost our democracy.

Although some of the other informants may also feel the same way, Liz was the only one to verbalize any positive sentiment. The fact that only one informant mentioned this tenet of our society's political philosophy may speak to the notion that activists tend to sometimes take the

positive aspects of our political establishment for granted. However, it also speaks volumes of those who would rather suppress the views expressed by people like environmental activists. It is my perception that the people interviewed for this study are socially concerned, politically aware, and possessing visions for maintaining life on the planet which have been thought through far more than most of the rest of society. That so little good has been attributed by the informants to the establishment and those at its helm should not necessarily be seen as the rantings of a group of ingrates, complainers, and political n'er-do-wells. Instead, an introspective critique of what our goals are as member species of the Earth and what social and political policies might be necessary in order to achieve those goals is more likely what is needed.

The question remains, however, of exactly how this theme contributes to the motivation of environmental activists. The answer is relatively simple. If one perceives the individuals chosen to represent our society as making wrong decisions or decisions based on ignorance with regard to something one values highly, there immediately exists incentive to help remedy the situation.



## PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL PARAMETERS

This theme deals with the perceptions held by environmental activists of society in general. In defining themselves as environmental activists earlier in the chapter, one aspect considered important to the informants was an attempt to change society in its values, attitudes, and ultimately behavior toward the natural world. The social parameters referred to in this theme are the very aspects of society which environmental activists would like to change (i.e., values, attitudes, and behaviours). It becomes apparent, then, that a major goal of the informants is to educate toward such a change in society and how they perceive the society they are attempting to change certainly can affect how the informants approach their activism.

### Increasing Awareness and Activity in Society

It is interesting that as a group the informants do not harbour the same resentment for the general public as they do for the establishment. In speculating on this point, two reasons come to mind which might provide some explanation. First of all, the informants may expect more from those people who have sought to place themselves in positions of responsibility. It is understandable to place blame with the government officials who are in the positions of directly making the decisions which affect us.

Second, the informants tend to see society as more open to change than the establishment. In one interview Jo was promoting voluntary simplicity (the practice of living with fewer "conveniences" and eschewing consumerism) as a direction that society must move towards. Her point was that we should not ask ourselves if we need to change, but rather how we should go about changing. She added that, "We have to look at not only how we change our own lives, but how we bring about the change in society". Jo had been studying various situations in societal change and I asked her how she might propose to bring about such a change in environmental attitudes and behavior. Her response was: "I'm still studying (laughs), but I think it's happening. I'm not sure we can put a plan in place, you know. I think it's happening. Communities are changing, individuals are changing". As a matter of fact, Jo is quite optimistic about the potential for society to change.

So, yes, I am optimistic, but I'm mostly optimistic about the changes in people's attitudes and their willingness to take action. Before it was a handful. When I got involved there was perhaps half a dozen active environmentalists in this province and pretty well all the work fell to those. Now people come to me, not to ask me to do something for them so much, but to ask me what they can do for themselves. And that's a complete difference, a complete change. And now it's not the nuts that are coming. It's the farmers and the housewives and the teachers, you know, ordinary everyday citizens who are concerned and want to do something. So, it's not the radicals, although some of them have some pretty radical ideas. It's those people who care and see what's happening and want to do something about it and it's exciting.

In talking about how the public views environmental activists, Wes made a comparison between his perception of government (and the public's perception of government) and his hope for society.

If you look at the public opinion polls, countless ones have been done over the last few years. People are saying, "I'm willing to pay more for my gas, for instance, if there's a tax that'll go to fix up the environment. I want to see polluters go to jail. I want to see stiffer fines. Government isn't doing enough. I believe the environmentalists way more than the government or industry". So, I think there's a public consciousness out there and a concern that's real; that it's being turned into real practices. I mean, we have over a 90% participatory rate of the Blue Box program in Edmonton. That kind of stuff says to me that if people are given the opportunity, the option, the ability to help the part of the solution, they'll do it. Of course they will!

### The Changing Role of Environmental Activists

The credibility of environmental activists has been recognized by the public in recent years, as Wes noted. However, Wes has also seen enough change in social attitudes toward environmental activists to force some recognition from the establishment as well. This came out when I asked him if he thought that the roles of environmental activists had changed over the years.

Changed? Well, I've gone from working on a lot of single issue stuff to more broad policies. That's been a big shift. ...and sometimes I pinch myself and wonder, "God, some of us environmentalists are now in the role of being policy advisors to government and even to industry and what a shift that is from being antagonistic and confrontational to actually being in a position of some power and (in the role of) an advisor. So, that's been a big shift.

Lena has noticed some definite changes over the years as well. In her years as an advocate for wilderness areas, Lena has had the opportunity to speak with a number of people. We were discussing the fact that her workload has been increasing and she credited some of that to the increase in public awareness and willingness to become involved.

I remember that in the early 70's (and) into the early 80's part of the concern of conservation and environment groups was to educate the public and I think to some extent that's been done. It's starting to touch most everybody in their own homes. Now it's not so much raising awareness. In the early years people would phone for information. Now they're not phoning for general information, they want specific information and ideas and direction on what they can do, which takes more time to answer.

Looking to the future of the movement, a few informants see continued advancement of public awareness and involvement.

People got on to recycling and so on, doing stuff in their own homes and their own neighborhoods. And I think in the next few years we're going to see a lot more people who've got involved and active through the do-things-in-your-own-home, recycling kind of stuff, (people) who've got that in hand, and now want to get out there and do something substantial with the really big issues and the roots of the problem. I'm sure we'll see more of that (Lena).

Jo compared the environmental movement to other social movements which have had powerful impacts on how we have structured today's society. The human rights and women's movements have begun to entrench values in society which until relatively recently were not even reflected by way of protective legislation. Jo feels that the environmental

movement will follow the pattern set by the other two.

We're seeing whole communities form around environmental and social ethic. So, I'm still searching for the answers, but I think there's not going to be one answer. For example, if you look at the civil rights or the women's movement, a lot of it came about because of radical action, bra burning or rioting or picketing or civil disobedience of some kind. And once that occurred, it raised people's awareness so that there were more subtle changes, then more subtle pressures where people started challenging things in court, for example or human rights commissions. So I think you have to catch people's attention sometimes and then change is going to occur in many, many different ways, just by people not accepting that they're going to be treated as second class citizens. As people's attitudes towards themselves change they will say, "Look, I'm not going to be denied a job because I'm a woman, or because I'm black. I'm going to challenge that".

Another hope for the future was expressed by Ted and what he has seen in working with children. Ted was impressed by the ability of the children to internalize the morality behind some of the environmental concepts he taught them. In getting feedback from some of the teachers of the classes he visited, Ted occasionally heard "...that the kids would go home and hound their parents and really get them to change their attitudes". The effect of this experience on Ted was that he began to consider the potential for social change through educating children.

That these kids could not only change their own lives, but go out and change their parents' lives was impressive, and to me is still impressive. It gives me hope that even if we write off the next 10 years and the tragedy of the environmental degradation continues, I think that if we can invest some time and effort into the kids who are in elementary and junior high these days, I think that by the time they get out, they'll be willing to see some big changes.



### Social Inaction

However, there is not always a clear message for the informants in terms of social change. Environmental activists are asking for some fundamental shifts in thinking on a societal level and although they do see some progress in that direction, they are unsure that we will be able to make such a massive conversion in the near future.

But I must admit if this is the turnaround decade, to see the turnaround at this rate, it's going to take more like a century. But who knows? Maybe there is momentum building for the change to happen like you see in the anti-smoking movement or the (non) smokers' rights movement. Ten years ago when I was in a room and asked someone to not smoke, they looked at me like they were ready to punch me out, even if I asked them nicely. Then today we now find that the situation has changed radically. Those sorts of situations, I think, can be inspirational (Ted).

Throughout the interview, Ted discussed aspects of society that were both positive and negative. By no means was Ted the only informant to show two sides to his feelings of society in this regard, but his dilemma on how to judge the public was more pronounced than the others. Having already demonstrated a degree of faith in society, Ted offered this consideration:

I think our society is really, not only in trouble, but I guess I'm really disappointed in our society. I think that people are just too accepting of things. In my own perspective, in my life, if something is wrong, I have a responsibility to do something about it. In our society people often talk about their rights. I mean, people do have rights, but concurrent with that are people's responsibilities. And I think that those responsibilities are often shrugged off and ignored.

As the discussion progressed, Ted seemed to seek an

explanation for the inconsistent nature of society and its reluctance to accept responsibility for action.

I think on a one-on-one scale people will have a sense of responsibility. You know for yourself, you'll do things, if you as an individual are hurt or in pain or need food or whatever, obviously the individual will take action to deal with those needs. And I think radiating out from that most people will do that as well for their immediate family. The community is a bit more tenuous and less likely that people will go out of their way to help their community. I think even beyond that the global ecosystem is hard to relate to. It takes a lot of work. I think to relate to the ozone layer or the global warming or climate change or whatever you want to call it. But just because it takes hard work or it's hard to do or it's not as clear-cut, I think, is no excuse to do nothing. So, I think it's a flaw. I think it's a real flaw in our society.

Fran also demonstrated frustration at what might be considered apathy on the part of the general public. People's reticence to take an active interest in what happens outside their immediate frame of existence has always been a sore point for Fran. However, she proposed that people are generally interested only in what affects them directly and she recognized that they are often occupied with day-to-day routines. At a recent public meeting, the topic of discussion was the development of a plan for the future of the municipality. While there has been some intense debate in the area about this very subject, the meeting was poorly attended. That fact did not go unnoticed.

A city planner was at the meeting yesterday and said that if they'd held a hearing on a general municipal plan in any other world jurisdiction, 200 people would

have shown up. And we had about 15 or 20. So the frustrating thing, then, is trying to get people interested in something enough to come out. And I don't know why people don't -- people have a lot of things to do and maybe they just see it as something intimidating (Fran).

Apathy in large societies and the notion that someone else will accept the responsibility to act for oneself is well documented. The informants can attest to the fact that discrepancies exist for some people between their attitudes and their behaviors. Not everyone who sympathizes with the environmental movement follows up on their convictions with concrete action.

On one hand it bothers me a bit because in some sectors there seems to be the attitude, "We'll send in our membership and someone else can go through the pains of carrying the cause and the arguments for it." That's always bothered me to some extent; certainly there are some people there with that attitude who phone up and say, "Well what are you doing?" and we'll, in a polite way, get around to saying, "Well, what are you, yourself, doing because we're no different than you?" (Lena).

It would be prudent to add that Lena is not suggesting that those people who find themselves in a position to donate monetarily to environmental organizations stop doing so. The context of her statement meant to relay the value of direct, personal involvement by as many people as possible.

#### **Society's View of Environmental Activists**

As much as the informants are unsure of what to make of society in general, society is equally confounded by environmental activists. The feedback which the informants

receive seems to be generally positive, but the concept of devoting oneself to the movement to the extent that the informants have is beyond the grasp of some people. Not without humour, Wes described the experience of one's *raison d'être* being misunderstood.

Sometimes you have a hard time relating to other people about what you work in. People think,  
 "Well, what's your job?"  
 "Well, I'm an environmentalist."  
 "Yes, but what do you do for a living?"

Most of the informants reported receiving positive feedback from members of the public. When I asked her how she thought society viewed her as an activist, Lena was unsure at first, but then related a story in which she was given encouragement.

I'm probably not in touch with society in general. Let me see, when I moved into an old established community, they knew the day I moved in that I was an environmentalist, not necessarily because they had recognized me on T.V., but I think the person who sold the house had told them. They had wanted to know who was moving in. Just the other day one of the older gentlemen who I hadn't met before... stopped me on the street and said, "I understand that you're an environmentalist. We really need your help!". (The residents) are doing a community re-development plan and there's an old refinery site in the community and it's quite a toxic site and they're having quite a battle with Petro-Canada to try and get it cleaned up. So I think a lot of people are glad you're there. They may not necessarily agree with what you're doing, but I just have so many people who do tell me, "I'm glad you did such and such. You keep speaking out" or, "You keep telling them" kind of comments.

As Lena did at the start of her story, most informants were quick to caution that they probably could not predict accurately society's view of themselves as environmental

activists. "It's all really subjective because you hear from one person who says somebody else says such and such" (Ted). Fran also felt out of touch with how society perceives her.

I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know if it's me as an activist, but that's how they know me (as an activist). ...so people know you and I don't know if they just think you're a trouble-maker or if you're on the right track or if you're just way off base. I don't know.

It is not surprising that environmental activists are not sure of how they are perceived by the public. They are a group of people who are very close to the heart of some controversial issues. That there is a split in public opinion on these issues is enough to throw confusion into an attempt at giving a definitive answer about how such a large body of people might view oneself. Also, because they are often tied so closely to one side of an issue, it makes sense that the people who would agree with an environmental activist's stand would find it easier to give them feedback.

#### **Environmental Activism and Social Justice**

Most of the informants also communicated a concern for social justice in conjunction with their environmental activism. "You know, the questions of social justice are really the ones that motivate me as much as the environmental issues" (Ted). Jo felt similarly.

(My environmental concern) is part of a larger social



concern. I could as easily have been involved in social movements, social justice movements. It just so happens that the environment got there first.

Both Ted and Jo maintain that social justice is often inextricably linked to environmental issues. For most of the informants, the issue of native rights explored earlier in this chapter is a prime example. Ted also made the association of environmental issues to poverty.

I think that... to have a city where everybody recycles and has solar energy and toilet water dams in every toilet, but still people don't have a place to live and people are struggling to earn a decent wage to support their families, is not the vision that I have for a just and green and sustainable city.

Wes is another activist who saw the connection of his chosen field to events in the social arena. His concern is with the power of communities to make decisions which affect their local areas.

I am for sure focused on environmental issues, but I've always liked working from a community development planning point of view. You know, what's the health of the community? I did a lot of community planning, urban planning processes in the 70's and I always believe that they should have a say, and not just a say, but the say in how the community develops and how it grows because they have the responsibility of making and holding the decision-making power and they're going to take care of it and do the right things for it and they're not going to let bad things happen to it. It's a long-term strategy that will pay off. If you bring in a bunch of experts to do the work for them and do the planning, in a little while they'll make decisions and they're not going to care for anything, including the environment. It's not theirs. So the more we take away the power from the people in the community, the less better off they're going to be.

### Overpopulation

Another social problem which has direct implications for the environment, especially on a global scale is human overpopulation. Several of the informants cited overpopulation as a major environmental problem. Some credited it as the number one environmental disaster happening today. Dwight is one such person.

We're overpopulated. We have a place in the natural scheme of things, but we're way out of wack. And so we have to find ways to get the population under control. And I don't know how we do that. I hope somebody's working on that too. World population crisis and the disproportion between north and south are really two huge issues that nobody has come to grips with. And that's probably the environmental problem. Most environmentalists come to that conclusion after a while, no matter what you do.

I asked Wes what would have to happen for him to be happy enough with the state of the world that he could retire from being an environmental activist. There was no hesitation in his answer.

I don't think we're ever going to get there because of one thing: the (population) explosion. I mean there are just too many people. I could say some real bad things. Like, if I ever got there, when could I sit back and relax? When the population levels recede - in a major way.

The informants do not believe that the problem exists only in other corners of the world either. From an ecological standpoint, even Canada can be seen as overpopulated. Fran outlined the stand she takes with her friends on the topic of having children.

My friends hear this quite often when they complain about the state of the world and I complain about the number of people that are contributing to the state of the world. And as long as we all want so much, you know, it's hit the saturation point, but we haven't realized it yet. And I don't know how people can have children now. I guess it must be very worrisome for them to think of what their children are going to deal with in 20 years.

Fran believes having children in today's world to be socially and environmentally irresponsible. In talking with people who have children or want to have children, it has been Fran's experience that it is also to a large extent ego-gratifying in that people have a desire to reproduce something in their image or in some way leave a part of themselves to carry on.

#### The Need for Increased Involvement

In the final analysis, the informants definitely perceive some flaws in the social fabric and would like to see society make some changes, both major and minor. However, they also perceive society as a dynamic entity and that most people will eventually come around to act on what has shown to be morally correct. The progression of movements such as the human rights and women's movements in North America give them hope. As with anyone who has a vision of how the quality of life can be improved and becomes active to promote their vision, the change sometimes does not happen quickly enough. But in light of the potential for great social change and armed with the

conviction that what is right will come to pass, the informants have found in their perceptions of society reasons to be active.

Each in their own way, the informants are looking for ways to realize change on a societal level. Activists are beginning to identify a gap that exists in society between a growing public awareness of environmental issues and the willingness of people to become involved or to make substantial changes in their own lives. Among others, Ted has spent some time reflecting on this.

And in the last few years I've been wrestling with that gulf because it's really true with any environmental concept or any concept of change that you bring forward. Unless that you can put it into a package that people can relate to, they'll discount it. They'll ignore it or they'll not believe it. And I think that for me, now, in the last few years, that's been my real challenge. I think that I've gotten beyond the point of, "Are we in a crisis or not?". I know that we're in a crisis. I know that I can sit down and logically, scientifically prove to anybody that we're in a crisis. We can package that information and give it to people and show them objectively that we're in this crisis. We can explain to people in simple terms how bad this crisis is, but unless people can relate to it, it's a moot point. It's like, "Fine we're in a crisis, but I've got to make supper for my kids and I've got to get the kids to the day care and I've got bills to pay and so forth. You know, there's nothing I can do about it".

Later in our discussion, Ted proposed that we need more people becoming involved as activists and role models in order to generate the momentum necessary to create social change on a large scale.

I think that if we're going to see the types of changes that I feel we must see, if we as a species are going to continue on the planet, if the life-

support systems of the planet are to be maintained, I think we're going to need to see some action on a broad scale. And it's going to take people taking to the streets doing civil disobedience, putting themselves on the line and really showing the vision of how things could be different.

Jo foresees the incentive for change coming from a number of different areas, such as the media, environmental disasters and crises, and legal decisions. As for the human element in society, Jo believes that getting people to invest themselves in the movement requires education and encouragement in combination.

...once you start people along the road, I think it's a matter of encouraging them. As we said, we need to educate to action. It's not good enough to tell people what's wrong; you have to help them know what to do about it to bring about what's right.

Achieving the goal of giving people the skills to know what needs to be done and how to go about doing it is one way of empowering people as environmental activists. The informants have, largely on their own, developed these and other skills and in so doing have become empowered to carry out their work. The feeling of being empowered is another area which contributes to the involvement of environmental activists. It is also the subject of our last theme.

#### EMPOWERMENT

It's the empowering process and the community building process, in fact. When people start out they really feel helpless, like, "What can I do? Here's this big



industry, here's this big government who's going to do something and I can't do anything about it". And once they find out they can -- I mean, I've had 85-year old women come up to me and say, "I wrote a letter to the minister and I got an answer". And once they find out that they can make a difference you can't stop them, you really can't. And 3 years ago, we couldn't find anyone who wanted to speak to the media; now we can hardly keep them away from the media. We've got to try to figure out, out of all of them that want to speak, who is going to actually be part of a media conference. They have found that they can make a difference, that they do have power over their own lives and they do have power over what affects them. And that really brings about -- besides the community building and having to work together to support each other and all those things -- that really makes the difference, once people know that they can really do something (Val).

Val was responding to a question I had asked her. The question dealt with why she thought there was an increase in local involvement on environmental issues. Val obviously feels that people are starting to realize that if they are unhappy with decisions being made on their behalf they do have some power to affect those decisions. As Val observed, making a difference can be an extremely empowering experience. Once people feel empowered to act on something, their motivation to act also increases.

### Feeling Successful

There is a saying which reads, "nothing breeds success like success". This maxim applies as much to environmental activism as it does to any other facet of life. The 85-year old woman in Val's story felt successful in her letter-writing campaign. Winning on an issue is certainly

a success which fosters empowerment among environmental activists, but an overwhelming victory is a rare occurrence for the informants. At this point, success is a matter of how one defines it and Val preferred to define success as having made a difference.

I always tell people going into a fight that they're going to be winners, no matter what happens. Even if they don't get everything they want, the development's always going to be better, even if it goes ahead, because of what they've done. Now I think that's important for people to recognize, that things will never be worse because they've taken a position. And I always try to get people to identify what they see as the problem and what they see as the solution, with alternatives. So even if a plant goes ahead that they opposed, if it better controls the put-in place or if it's moved or the company is more responsive to people or better monitoring goes in place they're going to be winners because they've gotten involved.

I pressed the issue with Val at this point because I felt that some activists tend to think that if the main thrust of a development proposal goes through, one cannot call small mitigations a success. The exchange went as follows.

Brent: There is a different perspective that someone could take in terms of saying, "Well, sure we did some of these things, but ultimately we didn't get everything we wanted and the environment has been compromised". What do you say to that type of person?

Val: Those people don't last long as environmental activists. There are those people who go in with a win or lose attitude. You know, "If we don't get everything we want we're going to be losers". And they don't stay environmental activists very long or activists in anything because you don't get very far if you go into something and expect to win the first time around and get everything you wanted. It's a learning experience. It's a building experience, not only for ourselves, but for those we're fighting. And so, if you (can say), "Well, maybe I didn't get everything I wanted on (a certain issue), but it changed the government's attitude... and industry's

attitude towards the environment, and towards the reviews of the environment". So you have to take on somewhat of a long-term perspective. If you don't you're going to be discouraged pretty quickly and you are going to be a loser.

There seems to be a degree of truth for environmental activists in what Val says. Other informants have related situations which have become too frustrating for some of those involved. Jan described the effect that a sense of futility had on some of the members of her group.

Jan: Then after we found out that it really didn't matter and they were going ahead anyway, I think that a lot of us got "burnt" and decided that we could influence the community in other ways. We noticed that there was a real need in the school system for environmental awareness and many parents that were members thought that would suit them more.

Brent: Did you lose any people from that?

Jan: We may have, it's hard to say. I don't know. I don't think we lost anyone in moral support, but we probably lost some people who had been coming to the meetings and they say that well, there's no point now.

Not all the informants follow Val's advice, however.

Vince is one environmental activist who becomes very attached to the issues with which he deals. He tends to invest himself heart and soul into certain actions and sometimes sees his self-worth tied to the outcome of his involvement.

I think I am somewhat obsessive and when I get into an issue I want to complete what I've begun and I want to win. I guess there's the whole thing about your self-worth and your integrity as a person.... I think also when you get heavily involved in an issue, you want to see it through to the end and you want to win, you want to have something at least to show (for your efforts).

Contrary to Val's prediction, Vince is still active, but as he found out for himself, attaching oneself so securely to an issue and wagering one's self-worth on the results can have a roller-coaster type of effect over a period of time. Vince recalled the despair he felt after losing a battle to stop the construction of a nuclear power plant: "I was feeling kind of personally defeated and like my life for the last 10 years or so had reached a dead end, or at least a temporary dead end".

For other informants, feeling successful does not seem to be requisite for continuing their activism. Tony has painted a global picture for himself in terms of what is happening to the natural world and he believes that with a grasp of the global crisis we are facing, "...no environmentalist in Canada feels successful, I don't think". Asked if she has felt successful over the years as an environmental activist, Terri was not overwhelmingly confident.

Successful? (said tentatively). Of course when someone asks that the first thing that leaps to mind is the things you lost.... So you think of the ones you've lost, but you worry about the ones you've won or the ones you weren't there for and of course the ones we won were certainly worth it, no question.

Toward the end of this particular reflection, Terri decided that at least her activism had been worthwhile. Although her statement is positive, it does not necessarily follow that she has concluded that she has been successful. The fact that she has been involved and has won some of the

battles gives Terri the sense that her activism has had some effect and therefore worth. However, her definition of success for the environmental movement may be substantially higher than the goals she has managed to thus far reach.

### Friendship and Social Support

As we have seen, outright success, or success as defined by being involved, and witnessing one's input can motivate and empower environmental activists. Unfortunately for most of the informants, the environment is compromised more often than it is saved, which we have also seen tends to have negative motivational effects on activists. The question arises, then, as to what offsets the feelings of unsuccessfulness and keeps these informants involved. Of course, a number of answers in the form of previous descriptors and themes would still apply, such as a connectedness with nature, a commitment to action based on accepting responsibility, and a tenacity to not take no for an answer. Aside from these, there are other sources of empowerment which help to maintain the degree of commitment and level of activism demonstrated by the informants.

The social aspect of being an environmental activist can be very powerful. The comraderie and support for one's values are greatly enhanced when one interacts with others



who share similar thoughts and feelings toward the environment. Virtually all of the informants commented on the power of association. When Jan told the story of people in her group becoming too frustrated to continue showing up to meetings and being involved in direct activism against the development project, I wanted to know why some didn't give up. I asked her what she thought it was that kept a core group together and active in the fight. "I think probably because of communications and our computer network and those are the active people, the ones that have computers and modems". It is interesting to note that those people who had the opportunity to stay in contact with each other were also the ones who maintained their initial commitment to action. Jan acknowledged the impact that the others in her core group have had on her and she described her feelings toward them.

...when you get together with people who are really interested in the issues that you are, and they're just wonderful people, and you feel so good. They always look healthy and they just seem to exude some wonderful richness that you find with people who are working in the peace movement and environmental (movement).

In trying to pin down his reasoning for continued involvement, Tony had this to say:

I don't think it really happens at the rational level. I think you keep doing it just because you're doing it and you're hooked in. There aren't a lot of other people to step in and do it. Also because some of the friendships develop to be very strong, close friendships. And so if I bowed out of it completely, I'd probably have a hard time still maintaining those

friendships. I value the people in the movement and the people elsewhere that I've met (through my activism)....

Social support can also be quite important for people who are initially getting involved. Some of the people who make up the core of Jan's group, for example, have never before been involved in environmental activism. Terri also reported that when she began her involvement a number of years ago, she was somewhat anxious about attending a meeting of environmental activists. Her anxiety faded when she realized that, "...it was the kinds of people concerned about the same kinds of things I was concerned about". In outlining his introduction to the environmental movement, Jack told a story of using a "comparison card" to report producers of industrial black smoke. He described having a curiosity to know more about the issue which led to him contacting the group responsible for promoting the black smoke campaign. "Then I became more familiar with the group and started going to some of their board meetings and started becoming friendly with some of the people there and eventually got quite involved...". Although the bulk of Jack's involvement in this case can be attributed to his curiosity and persistence in his desire to know more, there was certainly a contributing social factor deserving of consideration.

Jack told of another experience in which the social aspect of a movement played an incredibly powerful role.

One other thing that I think was key in my development was an experience... where a group of people were organizing to fight against the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant. This particular power plant was really a key battle in the anti-nuclear, pro-nuclear fight in the States. And the spring of '79 I was part of a group of 1,440 people who got arrested for occupying the site, the construction site. It was an incredibly empowering experience because the (state officials) arrested us, and didn't know what the hell to do with us. They blew it... because after they arrested us all, they had to feed us, they had to shelter us, they had to take care of us. ...I mean, they don't often arrest huge groups of people. They put us up in the armories which are huge auditoriums. There were about 600 of us in the same room together. I stayed for about a week. We were organizing, talking, educating, visiting, strengthening our movement. That experience really gave me a sense of when enough people decide collectively to do something, there's immense power there, that even supersedes the power of the state.

In discovering the power of collective action on this scale, Jack also discovered a source of motivation for himself and others like him. He has also credited the experience for a significant part of his development as an activist. Social support does not always have to come in the measure which Jack was exposed to in order to be effective. Val described a group which originally formed around an issue, but has since taken on an a supportive and community oriented character. Similar to Val's group, constant contact with each other has made a difference.

I was out at a meeting last night and one of the women says, "Oh, I forgot your tapes" and then she says "Oh, do you have my books" and "Oh, Kim's jacket got left...". I mean, they're so much a community now -- this has got them together -- that they're trying to figure out whose clothes are at whose house. And they trade off on child care and one person will look after the kids at one hearing or meeting and someone else will do something else to help each other out. So, while the issue has divided the community in those who

are for and against development, the issue has brought the community together, the environmental community, or the activists, very much together, and made friends, and built up a whole support system.

### Lifestyle Changes

Immediately before this last theme, one or two of the informants were talking about lifestyle changes in a societal context. A few of the informants have realized that personal empowerment also seems to accompany lifestyle changes. Jack described the very freeing feeling that some people experience.

But I think what many people maybe don't realize is that by making those changes in their lives, not only are they helping the global situation, however nebulous that might be, but they actually help themselves in some small way to feel better about being alive. And that's sort of the uncounted bonus of making change, that no longer are you bogged down by the negative nastiness and being responsible for a very destructive and oppressive system, that you can slowly start to break yourself away from that and to feel good about that.

Val agrees with Jack's comments and believes that lifestyle changes strengthen people's commitments to the environmental movement. The process is usually a slow one, but can and often does lead to further changes.

We don't all of a sudden say one day, "I'm going to be a great environmentalist, and I'm going to do all these things and make all of these changes to my life". What you do is you get some positive feedback from what you do, whether it's internal or from others and it encourages you to do more and it encourages you to become more committed to what you are doing. ...You see people recycling or the kids come home and say, "How come you're throwing this away or how come we're using this product?". And so they do something different and, "Hey, it wasn't so bad. It didn't

cause me a lot of extra work or anything like that". And then they'll be more willing to try something else. They feel good about what they've done. They feel good that they've contributed to improving the environment so they've given some positive feedback to themselves and others give them positive feedback.

Both Val and Jack base their convictions not only on what they have observed in others as they become involved in the environmental movement, but also on their own application of a developing ecocentrism. Val added that, "People have to give themselves some credit for what they do and thank themselves for doing it in order to be motivated to continue to make those changes".

### Finding a Niche

A number of activists have been able to identify various areas of need in the environmental movement or even within the context of an environmental group. Recognizing a need and then stepping in to fill it is another way in which some of the informants have become empowered. Glen saw an organizational need in the movement and has since carved a very respected niche for himself. Terri has become one of the province's foremost researchers on environmental issues. For her, it was an area which needed attention and she recognized it because of her background.

Brent: Was that just a natural sort of flow for you to get into that end of things?

Terri: I suppose for me it was kind of natural because that comes from my training and my work experience.



In his time at college, Vince also recognized a need during a students' strike.

The leaders of the strike were mostly 4th year students, but age-wise I was not too different from them, and experience-wise I could see what the problem was. And at the same time the consistent thing with me is I like to make a contribution.

Vince made his contribution as an editor of a student newspaper on campus. Although this last example was more political than environmental in its activism, the concept of making oneself useful is transferable. Each of the informants has developed some niche in their line of environmental activism, but for purposes of confidentiality not all of them have been outlined.

#### Miscellaneous Sources of Empowerment

Individual informants identified a few other sources of empowerment. Terri found that an initial feeling of powerlessness was instrumental in propelling her environmental activism. After losing a wilderness area that was close to her heart because she had been uninformed, "I suppose from that point on I just didn't ever want to be in that position of not having a fair chance to have a say about an area I knew about". Terri also described how staying in touch with the natural world helps to keep her focused.

Those wildlands are part of my background and culture.... And the wilderness areas themselves -- when I started work here I was told to feel free whenever I feel the need to take time off, that I

should take time off. And so I will pack it up and go.

One informant finds empowerment in the form of civil disobedience. When asked if civil disobedience was a valid method of public participation, he responded: "Yes, I think it's an important tool in the democratic process. In my mind, the other side holds 51 of the 52 cards...".

In this theme, a number of situations and methods have been examined which create a sense of empowerment for people who are just entering the environmental movement and also for long-term activists seeking continued motivation. The last word on this subject goes to Jan who perhaps speaks for more than just herself in her belief that a great deal of empowerment can be generated by having the confidence to take the first step.

I had a letter in the paper this week trying to get people interested in coming to the general municipal plan hearings and I said, "Take back some of the authority that you've divested in these asshole councillors". I didn't say that, but that's what I meant. You know, "Speak up and get some empowerment".

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION, REFLECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### DISCUSSION

This study was designed to present a descriptive analysis of some of the motivations of a select group of environmental activists. If we turn back to the central question of the thesis (i.e., what motivates environmental activists to be involved?) we are reminded of the six sub-problems or sub-questions which were identified as being necessary to address in order to adequately answer the central question. For quick reference, those sub-questions are listed below.

- 1) What are the cultural aspects of environmental activism (i.e., what are the common bonds which serve to unite the informants)?
- 2) How do environmental activists see their relationship with society in general?
- 3) What are the worldviews of the informants? Two areas of interest were sought in attempting to deal with this question. First, what personal philosophies do the participants possess with regard to humanity's relationship with the natural world? Second, what general political orientations do participants hold and what implications do their orientations have for them as environmental activists?

- 4) What events, reasons, and other trigger mechanisms may have led environmental activists to initially become involved?
- 5) What roles(s) do environmental activists see themselves in with regard to the environmental movement?
- 6) What reasons and motivations do environmental activists possess for continuing their involvement?

#### Cultural Aspects of Environmental Activism (Sub-question 1)

Some definite commonalties among the informants have come through during this study. A number of real and apparent discrepancies also existed, but the consistent and strongly expressed descriptors and themes are what define the cultural aspects of this group of environmental activists. A discussion of these salient descriptors and themes, then, would serve to put the cultural meaning of environmental activism into perspective.

In defining themselves, the informants also defined some of the culture which surrounds environmental activism. Important to the informants for consideration as an environmental activist was the notion that activists should demonstrate some attempt to move society toward a more ecologically sensitive existence. This aspect of self-definition matches what I proposed in introducing the study, but the informants go a bit further in their expectations of themselves. All saw themselves as

providing some sort of leadership role, at least insofar as organization was concerned. Only one informant questioned me as to why I wanted to interview her in particular; the rest took it as a natural course of events, presumably because they had all been interviewed a number of times in the past.

Several informants stressed the importance of working beyond one's lifestyle to create change (i.e., operating on the basis of role-modeling one's lifestyle is not enough) and a number also spoke to the nature of environmental activism as being constantly involved. In comparing the original definition I offered at the outset of the study to the comments the informants, the main difference seems to be one of degrees. That the informants, as leaders in their fields of activism, are involved to a greater degree than other activists is not surprising. Although a definition strictly defining what is meant to be considered an environmental activist should not be weighted towards the level of participation among the informants, one amendment to my original definition must be made. The notion of activism according to the informants goes beyond one's lifestyle, a notion expressed as a minimum standard rather than as a matter of degree or level. I therefore propose an amended definition of an environmental activist as follows:



One who engages in actions which extend beyond merely using the routines of one's personal life-style (but do not exclude using one's lifestyle in conjunction with other actions) which are aimed directly at changing the behaviors and attitudes of others toward the natural environment. The term implies actions and behaviors carried out in favour of the natural environment.

Particularly established among the informants was their connectedness to nature. Although the feelings were not always describable on an individual level, a concern and respect for the natural world, its processes, and its species was always present in the informants' activism. Their connection to the Earth was related to an alternative worldview which did not place humans in a position of superiority or dominance over nature. This alternative worldview is especially important in determining the boundaries of an environmental activists' sub-culture because not only does it define them, but it defines what they are not. Seeing humanity as only one species in the natural scheme of things and as subject to the laws of nature is a concept which the larger society has not yet come to grips with and therefore sets the informants, and others like them, apart from the larger social structure. Perhaps partly due to a rejection of their perceptions of how Western philosophies have treated the Earth, the overwhelming majority of informants (and, I believe, environmental activists) have embraced the aspects of traditional native cultures which also reflect a connection with the natural world.

The informants have seen many people become involved in the environmental movement during their tenure as activists and perceive most people as being motivated by threats to their personal health or to their lifestyles. This is somewhat different than for the informants who tended to express being personally affected as some kind of an extension of how the environment was being affected or threatened. This, of course, could be a result of the length of time the informants have been involved, but several of the informants specifically reported becoming involved because of their views rather than developing their views as a result of involvement.

Another striking consistency among the informants was their collective attitude toward the establishment, and in particular their distrust for government and its officials. Most of the informants would consider themselves, or would be considered by society to be, on the left of the mainstream in their political orientations with one or two feeling unaligned with any major political group. It should be made clear, however, that their environmental activism did not seem to stem from their political worldview, but rather from their natural worldview. This is an important distinction. Although social and environmental issues are perceived by most of the informants as being interwoven, the criticisms of government were based largely on their environmental

policies and behavior. The major political parties in Alberta and Canada generally outline their platforms on a variety of issues. While some of those parties may come closer to meeting the social philosophies of individual activists, I believe none of the three major political parties adequately endorses the environmental worldviews of the informants. On this level, personal political orientation is not a factor in environmental activism. The informants might be inclined to initially give a personally favoured political party more leeway, but eventually if said party did not adequately address their environmental concerns, the informants would probably pursue the issues as fervently as in the past. What really is at issue in the relationship between the informants and government, then, is the frustration experienced by the environmental activists because of the anthropocentric nature of the establishment.

The informants were not quite so harsh on society in general and in fact tended to agree that public awareness of environmental issues was increasing. Several informants also noted an increase in the level of activism over the years. However, while this positive attitude toward society existed, there was some concern about the rate at which we are progressing. Although social movements generally tend to take years before any substantial changes are seen on any broad scale, a sense of urgency expressed

by some activists might be due to the perception that time is of the essence in this particular movement.

One social institution that every single informant expressed disappointment with was population growth. It is interesting that although overpopulation was cited among the informants as one of, if not the major environmental problems, none of the informants was working directly on that issue. No one even mentioned anyone they knew who was working on it. In speculating on possible reasons for an apparent gap in the environmental movement, a number of possibilities emerge. First, it is such a monstrous issue that it would be hard to know where to begin. It is a global concern and most of the problem exists outside Canadian borders, making it difficult to confront. One would also have to deal with the unwelcome stigma of being a rich foreigner trying to tell another culture how to live. Associated with that is the personal, cultural, and religious baggage which accompanies having children, either globally or locally. Completing the circle, the issue is so massive and so sensitive that it would be virtually impossible to see change or progress. The most complicated of any other environmental issue in Canada is probably infinitely simpler to tackle. It should be noted that one of the informants does talk to her friends about this subject when the opportunity arises.

As in other cultures, the informants share some

similar personal attributes which lend themselves to identifying members of their particular sub-culture. By the nature of their activism the informants show evidence of critical thinking through questioning authority figures and an associated commitment to finding solutions for problems. To a person, the informants demonstrated and spoke to the need for accepting a degree of personal responsibility for the state of the environment and being willing to act on that responsibility. Most believed that it is important to be personally consistent in terms of adopting a more ecologically sensitive lifestyle and all the informants seemed to utilize their personal lifestyles in attempting to effect changes in others. There was some confusion among the informants as to whether environmental activists are or should feel optimistic. This confusion was also expressed at times on an internal level, as evidenced by some of the informants' statements. The conflict between optimism and pessimism is understandable in light of the many different perspectives one could take in evaluating the environmental movement or one's own activism. An examination of the degree of success informants felt seems to closely mirror the confusion in their optimism and are no doubt connected in some way. Such a connection makes sense when one considers that feeling successful in one's work would probably positively influence how optimistic one feels as well.



One area which proved to be confusing for me was the concept of accepting others' approaches to activism. Most of the informants expressed a need for acceptance and a few even extolled the benefits of a variety of approaches. There was, of course, one informant who did not counsel acceptance, but on the whole the trend was otherwise. This was somewhat incongruous, however, with what I heard in terms of how much infighting existed in the environmental movement. During the course of this project, I realized that there was a significant enough degree of infighting and struggling for power within and among groups to be mentioned by several of the informants (see Accepting Other Activists' Approaches). In speculating on this apparent discrepancy between what was counselled by the informants (i.e., acceptance) and the reports of disagreement and fighting, I offer the following explanation.

Although I have no behavioral evidence to confirm it, I believe the informants who felt the need to accept a variety of environmental activists' approaches were sincere in what they said and followed through in their sincerity. It is entirely possible that the informants as a group are not representative of environmental activists in general with regard to this issue. Another, more likely, possibility is that the informants, having generally had more years and experience in the field of environmental activism, have had a wider exposure to other approaches and

recognize their contributions. Whatever the reasons for this apparent discrepancy, the whole issue is deserving of closer inspection in some future study.

One of the unifying features in activism expressed by the informants was the support and empowerment they received from the people who they had become involved with in environmental issues. The roles of mutual social support and friendship seem to be important ones in motivating people to both initiate and continue their activism. Nearly all the informants also saw the process of making changes to one's lifestyle as empowering and contributing to people's commitment of environmental activism. Finally, the sense that one is contributing to the movement is another motivating factor. Several of the informants seem to have accomplished this by identifying and then filling a niche in the movement.

#### A Word on the Analysis Process

Having discussed the cultural aspects of sub-question 1 it would only be repetitive to deal with each of the other sub-questions in turn. The reason, of course, is that the answers to the sub-questions seem to closely parallel the themes which have been developed and analyzed in the previous chapter and then discussed further above.

It is interesting to note the similarity which exists between the answers to the sub-questions and the themes

which developed through the study. On one level it only makes sense having designed the interview to answer the sub-questions that I would, in fact, get themes which answered these questions. However, what I find to be interesting is that in developing the themes after conducting the interviews I did not refer to the sub-questions I had settled on earlier in the study. I must further admit that at the time I was conducting my thematic analysis, I had not looked at my initial set of sub-questions for at least 8 months. In fact I only realized the similarity during the write-up of my thesis. This may well be considered poor form and make a statement about me as a researcher, but in my favour, it adds strength to my claim that I have indeed answered the questions that I set out to answer.

A quick glance at the sub-questions reveals that the second question has created the theme dealing with the informants' perceptions of social parameters. The question on worldviews spawned the themes of connectedness with nature and perceptions of the establishment. Discovering the reasons, events, and other mechanisms of initial involvement in part gave rise to the themes of being personally affected and personal attributes. However, in retrospect I believe that in some ways this sub-question was a restatement of the central question. The answer of what role is played by the informants was achieved through

the theme defining environmental activism. The last sub-question could be dealt with by some of the same answers which governed initial involvement. Certain personal attributes, persistence for example, would account for some continued involvement. But this sub-question also helped to bring form to the theme of empowerment because continued activism seems to depend heavily on the descriptors ascribed to this theme.

#### The Interconnectedness of Themes

Mention has been made of the interconnectedness of the themes presented in this thesis on more than one occasion. The thick description which introduced Sue as a composite from the informants was an attempt to convey the message that there is a great deal of interplay among the themes when viewed in their human context. In the natural world, nothing exists in isolation and such is also the case for describing environmental activists. In their study on predicting recycling behaviors, Simmons and Widmar (1990) concluded:

The complexity of the interactions among the various factors should be recognized; no one variable seems to act alone. Positive attitudes in isolation will not guarantee action. A web of factors, including attitudes, intrinsic motivations, and a perceived sense of efficacy and knowledge must all be nurtured if consistent behaviors are to be the end result (p. 17).

Reflecting on the relationships between the various

themes and descriptors can become so complex and convoluted it is difficult to know where to begin and where to end the process. One could make an argument for drawing lines of relationship between one theme or descriptor and virtually any other theme or descriptor in this study. One of the more obvious possibilities, for example, would be the link between experiencing a sense of loss over the destruction of a wilderness area and feeling a connectedness with nature. Both have been shown here to provide some motivation for involvement in environmental activism and both are undoubtedly related in some way. It would be difficult to conceive of someone not caring about the natural world feeling a sense of loss over wilderness destruction or vice versa.

A detailed examination of the relationships which might exist among the various themes and descriptors is beyond the scope of this thesis, but could prove to be useful and interesting as the focus of some future study. One of the goals of this project was to provide a platform for the development of further study in the area and I believe this has been accomplished to some extent. For me the process has raised more questions than it has answered. Some recommendations for further study will be covered in that section, but there are probably many more possibilities for avenues of research than I could identify.



Two other notes on thematic relationships revolve more specifically around the nature of the informants. It appears that although there are similarities among the informants in terms of some general areas of motivation, there is a degree of difference in how various informants weighted each of these areas for themselves. I noticed this in writing up the thematic analysis. Inevitably some informants were more prolific in their comments on one theme or another, and then tended to be less so for other themes. Areas of interest seemed to emerge for the informants with one taking an avid interest in the political aspects of the discussion, for example, while another became more expressive while describing their relationship to the Earth.

Another difference surfaced with how informants developed similar attributes and outlooks. The informants have been affected throughout their lives by various factors such as the structure of their family life, encounters with alternative education, and other general life experiences which have led them toward working in the environmental activist's domain. An example of this might prove to be useful. For instance, suppose an individual was encouraged by her parents to ask questions about her world as a child. When she matures and runs into situations which she considers to be unjust but are supported by authority figures, say politicians, she will

have the background necessary to ask pointed questions about the politicians' rationale for proposing their course of action. Now consider the possibility of a boy in high school who had the benefit of a teacher who openly advocated critical thinking and taught lessons designed to promote that skill. Like the girl, this boy would also have the propensity to logically critique the activity of authority figures if he perceived their activities to be less than sound. The point here is that although the circumstances surrounding the lessons which both these people have learned are quite different, the final result in personal attributes are similar when applied to environmental activism.

The implication for outdoor educators is clear. The development of any motivational strategy must include a broad spectrum of incentives to become involved in order to accommodate individual interests and strengths and the flexibility to encourage people to explore those interests and utilize their particular strengths.

### Comparing the Results

With regard to the literature review, the results presented in this thesis have been quite different. Because this study was designed partly to take a step back in an attempt to shore up the foundation of future research, it is difficult to compare the broad, descriptive

findings here to the narrowly focused studies discussed in the literature review. For example, this study was not too concerned with the sociodemographic profiles of environmental activists, and therefore cannot contribute very much directly to the debate on factors such as age, gender, and income level. Issues such as "verbal commitment and "actual commitment" are moot points among people who are already embroiled in environmental activism to the degree that the informants are. Also, factors have been explored here which have been largely ignored by other studies (e.g., the concept of empowerment, lifestyle role modeling, connectedness to nature, perceptions of the establishment). Moreover, it has been shown that some aspects of the informants' motivations cannot be treated in isolation. There exists a degree of interconnectedness among the themes and descriptors which should not be ignored. In some respects, a comparison of the findings in this study to the results of other, more positivistic studies, is simply not applicable.

On the other hand, some aspects of this thesis at least run parallel to other studies and comparative connections can be made at that level. For example, support for the concept of "accepting responsibility" is given by Schahn and Holzer (1990) and Hines et al. (1987). Schahn and Holzer used the term "internal attribution of responsibility" while Hines et al. referred to the concept

as an individual's sense of responsibility. Also, Koenig (1975) would accept the conclusion that the informants seemed to display a concern for other social issues as well as environmentalism. However, the larger question of which one is a function of the other is still open for debate.

The lack of certainty by the informants on how to perceive society in general was also reflected somewhat in the literature. The informants perceived a positive overall sentiment by the public toward the environment and even an increase in the number of people who are becoming active. However, there was also the sense among the informants that, proportionately, there was not as much follow-up (i.e., activism) as there is concern in society. It would appear that not much has changed in the 20 years since O'Riordan (1971) found such a huge discrepancy between concern and action among residents near a lake which was to be environmentally compromised. Other authors (e.g., Maloney and Ward, 1973; Macintosh, 1989) have felt similarly. In my view, the problem is an educational one. In an extremely large number of areas in which we expect people to contribute to society, we have deemed it necessary to educate our members toward those ends. If, as a society, we value the natural world and wish to do a better job of protecting the Earth and its ecosystems, we must educate our members, both in values and in skills, in order to achieve such a goal. As educators, we presently

have an opportunity to educate students at all levels on these issues proactively, instead of waiting until the process of informal social change has already happened and then deciding to teach students about established social norms.

The concept of progression might be as useful to employ in educating toward environmental activism as it is in other educational pursuits. A few authors and researchers have suggested that, for many people, initial involvement in environmental activism can often be attributed to anthropocentric reasons. This is consistent with the informants' perceptions that most people tend to become involved because they feel threatened in some way. The implication for this revelation is that educators might have to, initially at least, develop the direct relevance of environmental issues not only to the welfare of humans, but to the welfare of each individual. This could be accomplished by dealing with extremely local issues which affect the lives of the particular student audience. Of course, there should be some built-in objectives for progressing from such isolated, "me-oriented" concepts to more ecocentric ways of thinking.



## REFLECTIONS

The environmental movement is relatively young, and as several authors in the review of literature pointed out, it will likely continue to grow and evolve. After going through the process of carrying out this study and after witnessing first-hand the commitments of the informants to their cause, I am also convinced that the movement will continue to pick up momentum. The informants, and those like them, are acting with the knowledge and the confidence that they are right in their actions. Given the historical perspective of our attitudes toward the environment and the current public perception of the Earth's ecological status, I believe our society is moving toward a major shift in its environmental values. At present, most people still maintain an anthropocentric outlook of our existence on the planet. But just as we have had to recognize in the past that the Earth is not at the center of the universe, humans will have to re-think their position that they are the center of existence on Earth.

It is a difficult realization that one is not necessarily as important as one has previously believed, but ecologically, it is one I believe we are destined to reach. We have demonstrated our abilities to think, to reason, and to alter our environment. We have invented technologies and methods which in some ways make our lives more comfortable. We have even been able to subjugate all

the other species, regardless of strength or size, because of our technological capacities. However, all of these accomplishments cannot, and do not, bestow upon us the title of "important".

The effect this thesis (and the process I have undergone to develop it) has had on me is enormous. In many ways my personal world has been turned upside down because of a shifting, sifting, and a re-focusing of my own values. During this study, I have learned a great deal about environmental activism, but I have probably learned more about myself. I feel that my purpose has been made clearer and that my direction in life is more defined. I hope to continue learning about ecologically sensitive living and I wish to help others gain an ecocentric worldview.

Insofar as the thesis itself is concerned, I realize that the results, or at least the impact of the results, could have been made stronger. I would have liked to have had the opportunity to return to the informants for a follow-up interview after completing the analysis of the first set of interviews, and that intention was part of the study's original design. As in the case of many researchers before me, the resources of time and money ran short. Instead, I mailed the pertinent information from the analysis and a list of the quotes I wished to use from each informant and requested that they return any comments

they had for me. The return rate was low (I only heard from two of the seven informants), but it is perhaps not surprising considering the amount of time which would have been involved in reading and commenting on the material I sent to each of them. Although the comments I did receive were quite helpful in further analysis and generally positive, a second interview would have facilitated the process and would have ensured greater feedback.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for Further Study

As I mentioned, there are many possibilities for future research which may be generated from this thesis. In my view some of the more obvious and needed ideas are outlined below.

- 1) There is room for empirical research which focuses on the strength of the relationships between and among the themes and descriptors outlined in this study.
- 2) There is a need for the development of a strategy or strategies which aim to motivate more people to become involved. As noted, any strategy should consider a broad base of motivations as well as being flexible enough to accommodate individual interests.
- 3) Associated with the previous recommendation is the

need for more research in the area of perceived barriers to involvement by those people who are concerned, but not active.

4) A longitudinal study which follows a group of people from initial involvement through several years of activism would be invaluable in describing the evolution of such things as worldviews, lifestyle changes, and feelings of empowerment.

5) The exploration of some of the discrepancies in this study would also be useful (e.g., the apparent disparity between a reported preference by most informants for cooperation in the environmental movement and the amount of infighting among activists).

6) A study of the general public's and non-activists' perceptions of environmental activists could prove helpful to activists in their dealings with the public.

7) It would be interesting to conduct a study which focuses on a single environmental organization and utilizes a true ethnographic approach in order to compare the results with what has been found here. Such a study would broaden the base of our knowledge of environmental activists from the leadership level to include a greater cross-section of the culture at large.

### Recommendations for Activists and Outdoor Educators

Environmental activists and outdoor educators are often trying to accomplish the same thing - the education of people about environmental principles and their relationship to the Earth. Indeed, many outdoor educators are activists and vice versa. I can think of two recommendations which might benefit the environmental movement.

- 1) Outdoor educators should spend more time educating toward action. At all levels educators need to include some degree of instruction which is not only aimed at the knowledge and awareness of environmental issues, but also at increasing students' motivation and skills necessary to become involved.
- 2) It is my perception that environmental activists spend almost all of their available time and energy devoted to the most pressing concerns - the issues. Although this is at the heart of environmental activism, another goal expressed by the informants is to influence society and hopefully convince people to become active themselves. Based on the comments of a few informants during the study, it is also my perception that the general public does not quite understand environmental activists. My suggestion, then, is to actively promote a public relations campaign of environmental activism. Just as the informants mentioned that it is not enough to be considered active by merely



setting lifestyle examples, it may also not be enough to let society judge environmental activism on second-hand reports through the media, for example. Direct action on an educational campaign to inform the public what it means to be an environmental activist could go a long way to convincing other concerned people that they are not so unlike those who are active after all.

3) All educators who deal with outdoor education should teach toward the acceptance of ecocentric values. If our society were to adopt a more ecocentric way of thinking, our lifestyles and the decisions we make which affect the environment would begin to fall into line.

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## GLOSSARY

### **Anthropocentrism**

A way of thinking which holds humans as the first and final consideration in ecological decision-making. The term does not necessarily connote anti-environmentalism, but is often associated with environmentally destructive activity due to its lack of concern for other species.

### **Ecocentrism**

A way of thinking in which humans see themselves as vitally linked to the Earth and its processes, a way of thinking which does not merely focus on human welfare, but on the welfare of the ecological whole, and which is incorporated into the ecological decisions we make.

### **Natural World**

Those parts of the Earth which remain relatively untouched by the technological advances of humanity. This definition attempts to recognize two important factors in describing the natural world. First, humans have traditionally been a part of the Earth's natural processes and should not be excluded. Such a position of exclusion would only serve to further the separation from the Earth which much of humanity currently experiences. Second,

although there needs to be an inclusion of humans in the natural world, it also needs to be acknowledged that human technology has altered the character of human ecological involvement so as to be unrecognizable in any of the traditional natural processes.

### **Worldview**

The perceptions of an individual or group as they relate to aspects of a philosophy. For example, a natural worldview deals with an individual's or a group's ideas on how the natural world should be perceived or thought of.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

## CONSENT FORM

Project Motivations for environmental activism:  
Title: A description and analysis of a sub-culture.

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Advisor: (403)492-2311

Project  
Description: The purpose of the study is to attempt to gain some insight into the motivations for involvement of environmental activists. The researcher will attempt to accomplish this by seeking personal interviews from people who have been referred to him by individuals or organizations also involved in the environmental arena. The aim of the interview process is to obtain information on environmental activists from their own perspectives.

The undersigned should be aware that the identity of the interviewee will be kept confidential with the researcher being the only person with access to tapes, transcripts, or notes of the interviews. Any quotations from the interviewee used in the researcher's analysis/report will also be kept confidential. The undersigned should further be aware that the interviewee may decline to participate in or withdraw from the interview and/or the project AT ANY TIME without consequences.

The interview process will involve a time commitment of between 2-3 hours, unless mutually agreed upon by the interviewee and the researcher. Any questions regarding the procedures or other aspects of the project are welcomed by the researcher.

The interviewee, having read the above and having received a copy of this form, hereby consents to participate in the research project named and described above.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWEE \_\_\_\_\_

RESEARCHER \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) How would you define an environmental activist (i.e., what does being an environmental activist mean to you)?
- 2) At what point would you say you first became an environmental activist?
- 3) What prompted/influenced you to become involved?
- 4) Can you describe the circumstances surrounding your initial involvement?
- 5) Do you identify with any particular environmental activists in the past or present?
- 6) Were you exposed to any mentors already involved in environmental activism when you first became involved? If so, can you describe what this person was like?
- 7) Describe some of the actions you have been involved in. What was your role during these campaigns?
- 8) Did you feel successful in these actions/campaigns?
- 9) Which actions/campaigns were your favourites? Why?
- 10) How do you think society in general views you, the activist? Do you think this has changed over the time you have been involved as an activist? If so, in what ways?
- 11) How do you view society in terms of its level of environmental concern? Have your views in this regard changed over time?
- 12) How do you envision humans fitting in to the natural scheme of things?
- 13) What would have to happen for you to be satisfied with human behavior regarding the environment?
- 14) How does your lifestyle reflect your beliefs?
- 15) What do you think of the spectrum of activists which exist today (and their tactics)?
- 16) Is your activism environmentally focused or is it part of a larger social concern?
- 17) Is there any thing you would like to add?